

Bark like a God

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/39040674) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/39040674>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham , Hannibal Lecter , Chiyoh (Hannibal) , Original Characters
Additional Tags:	Post-Fall (Hannibal) , Injury Recovery , BDSM , Platonic BDSM , sometimes platonic but mostly sexual , Mute Hannibal Lecter , Autistic Will Graham , Sign Language , Nonverbal Communication , Psychological Trauma , Working through trauma with kink , Praise Kink , Blood Kink , Kink Negotiation , Puppy Play , Bondage , Subspace , Aftercare , Feral Behavior , Dom Hannibal Lecter , Sub Hannibal Lecter , Sub Will Graham , Dom Will Graham , Switching , Fight Sex , Predator/Prey , Caring Hannibal Lecter , Possessive Sex , Possessive Will Graham , Possessive Hannibal Lecter , Marking , Somnophilia , Gentle Sex , Rough Sex , Body Worship , Muzzles , Painplay , Breathplay , Bathing/Washing , Collars , Will Graham on a Leash , Leashes , Knifeplay , Scars , Crying , Consensual But Not Safe Or Sane , Hannibal Lecter On A Leash , Metaphors , Religious Imagery & Symbolism , once again this is basically a puppy play fic camouflaged by religious imagery and blood , strap in boys this is gonna be a monstrosity , Trans Male Character , Trans Will Graham , Trans Hannibal Lecter , Dom/sub Undertones , Sleepy/Unconscious Sex , Biting , Scent Kink , crying during sex for several good and bad reasons , Slow Build , written by a trans man , Altered Mental States , Transphobia , Blood and Gore , Murder Tableau , Porn With Plot , Overstimulation , Dubious Consent , Implied/Referenced Assault
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-05-17 Updated: 2024-01-11 Words: 98,852 Chapters: 16/?

Bark like a God

by [scarletmothlet](#)

Summary

He wondered if Hannibal would learn to perk up at the sound of Will's uneven gait, meeting his eyes only after the last step. It would be learned without conscious noise- simple conditioning. Salivating at the sound of a bell, hungering at the sight of him. He wanted to be so deep inside Hannibal's cathedral of a mind that the very sound of Will's breath would set the beast's brain on fire, pulling on chains with no will of its own.

For now, though, he needed to nurse the man back to health. All in good time.

In which both Hannibal and Will survive the fall, with Hannibal gravely injured and nonspeaking. They navigate this new dynamic and the aftermath of becoming through exchanging power, vulnerability, and ownership- something bright as hellfire, holy as the tail of the fallen morning star.

Notes

This is just one big amalgamation of everything about these two floating around in my head. The plan is to have a story with four arcs/parts, and each will be multichaptered and (very) loosely reflect the show's character arcs. Y'all could call this one big character study with an insane amount of kink, projection and wish fulfillment slapped onto it. It is also a queer story where I explore Will and Hannibal's transness in a way that is character-compliant (i hope, bc this is kinda self indulgent and i need them to be happy-ish) and aligns with the idea of becoming, and everything that transpires after the grand becoming. Anyway hope you enjoy :)

This fic updates once a month (about every four weeks-ish) on Tuesdays.

Also **please read the tags**, click away if you're uncomfy with even one thing. I've made the mistake of skipping a single tag that was important to the fic and did not like that so- please be careful!! I'll be adding tags as I go, so things may change; please check in to see if anything's changed every once in a while! I will also add warnings if I introduce new topics in a chapter.

Note for NSFW content: Many of the chapters will be nsfw. For artistic choice and my own comfort as a trans man, there will be lots of metaphor overtop. Any explicit reference to both Will and Hannibal's genitalia will be with the terms cock, dick, growth, groin, sex, hole, foreskin, rim, and prosthetic (when specifically mentioning strap-ons).

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Golgotha

Chapter Summary

An introduction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Achilles wished all the Greeks would die, so he and Patroclus could conquer Troy alone. "

The city of Troy was burning.

The Great Red Dragon had been killed, and its white-hot breath had become an element of transformation, cleansing the Earth. A childhood prayer left long unspoken entered Hannibal's head as the air flew past him:

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world
grant us peace.*

In the arms of his beloved, his simultaneous god and devotee, the ice-cold water burning up his skin was the most heavenly feeling on Earth. Broken-bone hands searched for their divine counterparts; waves sent them bobbing up and down, grasping and keeping whatever they could hold. It was quite the tragic little dance, punctuated by seafoam sticking to curls and bloody skin. The rhythm was that of a lullaby.

Hannibal sighed. His breath was captured and enclosed in pockets under the water, floating up to the surface, hungering for open air.

For once, Hannibal was granted peace.

~

"It took divine intervention to bring them down."

The city of Troy was burning.

At this moment, Will wondered if Christ Pantocrator was watching. Whatever divine intervention Hannibal had been talking about, it wasn't doing much of anything, let alone killing them both. Matters had to be taken into his own hands.

The burning depths of his and Hannibal's skin were screaming and thirsty. When he placed his head against Hannibal's warm, heaving chest, Will felt flames licking at his skin hungrily, mercilessly and mercifully, both at once. The golden chalices of Will's senses were filled to

the brim with intoxicating sensation. He reveled in the smell of mixed blood seeping into soft fabric mingled with Hannibal's own, watching as his hands clasped that bloody shirt with all the love they could show. He willed his love to rise from his body like hot air, to meet Hannibal's own and blend with it. To be requited in full, defying the laws of morality and gravity. Divine mercy at last.

This divine gravity worked in their favor. The weight of the world surrounded them and enclosed their bodies in a bubble of soft wind; a shelter of gentle air that would break into knives and teeth any second now.

A moment of devastating peace gave way to peaceful baptismal devastation. The flames became water, lapping at him with its countless fiery tongues, scorching his skin until it cracked. The ocean's thunderous roar tore his skin at the seams and pumped his lungs full of holy water.

The last teacup had broken.

~

Hannibal's skin tasted salty. It was as if evolution had only been a figment of the collective imagination, and Hannibal was the first creature to be birthed from the sea; Will took the taste in as he dragged the unconscious man through the water. He found it somewhat amusing that one of the things on his mind as he fought for their mutual survival was the taste of a cannibal's flesh.

The night was quiet. The ocean was calm; the sea's violent nature was only visible where the water met rock. Waves crashed against the cliff and broke apart into delicate flecks of white, landing with a sting on Will's shredded cheek. They were too far from the cliffs to be safe from drowning, too close to be safe from the knife-sharp rocks ahead. Land was a lighthouse, a beacon of hope until you hit the shore and met certain death.

Will decided to brave ahead and find a suitably flat rock to rest on. Maybe he could revive Hannibal in time before he met his death. And if this fate was to befall them both, at least it could be in peace.

His feet scraped against too many sharp edges to count. Looking down presented him with the gift of bloody, sticky water sinking into his skin. It seemed to cling to them both, and Will struggled to move through the thick water. He raised Hannibal up as much as he could, out of reach of the rocks; the beast of a man had unbelievable pain tolerance, but Will didn't wish any more hurt on him than was right and just.

Will's free hand caught on a flat surface and held on to it for dear life. He couldn't see much in the dark, but the faint cloud-spotted moonlight was enough for him to roll Hannibal onto the rock with relative grace, considering their thin threads of fate.

He clung onto the side of the rock, one hand on the surface, another gripping Hannibal's wrist. No pulse.

An onlooker may have assumed Hannibal had found his coffin, the mourning widow beside him. The brunette waited, catching his breath as waves lapped at Hannibal's feet and teased his own sodden curls that clung uncomfortably to his forehead. Will knew the feeling; it was there when he woke up in a cold sweat night upon night, there on the day Hannibal forgave him and took his make-believe daughter. It was here now.

He wondered why he hoped for the life of this helpless creature. Maybe it was human instinct, to nurture the pitiful injured thing instead of crushing it. Maybe Bedelia was wrong. Maybe he didn't love Hannibal; this was all to kill the monster, once and for all- to kill the loving monster and the monstrous human.

He would have time later to ponder if this was instinct or not. Maybe Hannibal would tell him, if he survived.

With whatever strength he had left, Will let go of the still body's wrist and pulled himself up onto the rock. His torn-up hands landed on Hannibal's chest as he willed gravity to give him the strength to return the sweet thrum of a pulse. He hoped the vaulted ceilings of Hannibal's rib cage wouldn't collapse under the force; how strong is the relic-box that holds the sacred heart? Could it bear to be pumped by lover's hands?

Blood alone does not fuel the phoenix's fire-birth. Will's mouth flew to the other man's lips and they collided, pushing life-giving breath into waterlogged lungs. Each inhale and exhale was a quiet, gasping prayer to the god of Hannibal's soul for more- more talk and more life and more death and more touch, until their very existences went numb from too much. Will prayed for it with this entire body to the only god he knew.

A whisper of a cough returned his prayer, becoming a chorus of glorious allelujahs that carried up to the organ pipes of The Resurrected's throat.

It sounded beautiful.

~

Dried blood and seawater were the first things to greet Hannibal's dulled senses. Their sweetness permeated every cell of his body; his skin was dry and cracked. He was weak, and a faint siren screamed at the back of his mind that his body was broken in every way- but he felt no pain. All that existed was the dark space behind his eyelids filled with blood and salt. As soon as his throat moved to say something to this lovely emptiness, the air became dense with the smell of soap and spice. His nose burned. The image of a little boat out on the ocean, floating quietly on a little white bottle, filled his void. Terrifyingly familiar. The lamb had risen from the sea.

Will watched as Hannibal writhed and whimpered without restraint; no force of nature could hold back the cries that spilled from his throat. His lips moved in a pattern- opening for a moment, coming together in coordination to whisper Will's name, then returning to labored breaths. His face moved similarly, eyebrows furrowing and relaxing with each thought. Pitiful injured thing.

Will sat himself beside the man on the small bed to observe, making sure not to touch Hannibal's shattered limbs. He was lucky to be alive; too many crushed ribs, femurs broken in a perfect pair. And to top it off, a debilitating head injury and a body beautifully covered in wine-red bruises. It was almost art, if not for the pain that would punctuate every future breath.

He placed a hand gently on Hannibal's forehead. The cabin room was warm and humid; Will pushed away a bout of worry, attributing any fever-like heat to the room. Hannibal calmed at the touch, his chest returning to its rhythmic, albeit labored, rise and fall.

Will made sure the IV drip from Hannibal's collection was working properly, pressed a hand to the good doctor's face for good measure, and left the cabin. A gust of sea-wind pushed past and escaped through the door as it swung closed, leaving Will to regain his balance. He had always been steady on his feet when sailing, but his broken leg and cane didn't allow for much stability. Crutches would have been useful, he thought, but a sprained hand couldn't carry half his body weight at the moment. Besides- Hannibal's impressive medical stockpile didn't have any light enough to carry onboard; Chiyoh insisted it was fact. She'd been of great help, making sure he was able to walk before bringing Hannibal on the boat, and taking care of the man when Will couldn't. She was with them now; Will could hear her footsteps approaching rapidly from the opposite end of the deck. She seemed to fly towards him and was too close to him, too close to Hannibal.

"He's awake?"

Will wanted to bare his teeth at her, tell her to leave him alone with his own mind and the sea, storms and all; he managed a grunt coupled with a soft nod. The response seemed to satisfy her and she backed off- but only physically.

"How endearing it is, that your name is all he can say when he's helpless like this." Cold, bitter amusement dripped from her voice, and the reality of the statement pulled a smile from Will's lips.

"All beasts seem weak in a cage, until the bars bend beneath their weight."

Chiyoh smiled, "maybe the wild tiger will purr like a kitten under your hand."

Will entertained the notion for a moment- Hannibal pushing up against his hand to earn a morsel of touch or praise- but found it impossible to hold.

"He'll bite strangers," his response was almost bitter, a hiss, "you of all people know that best."

"You're not a stranger."

He pulled his eyes away from Chiyoh's own and rested them on the wisp of a cloud in an otherwise spotless sky. The word, bright against the ink-black space under his eyelids, was there every time he blinked. "Nakama?"

Chiyoh made a noise of satisfaction and left him alone with his thoughts.

He realized he was on the center of the deck, and counted how many times his cane tapped against the wood as he pulled himself towards the railing. Four, with a nearly-silent click when he came to rest. Four and a half.

He wondered if Hannibal would learn to perk up at the sound, meeting his eyes only after the last click. It would be learned without conscious noise- simple conditioning. Salivating at the sound of a bell, hungering at the sight of him. Will wanted to be so deep inside Hannibal's mind that the very sound of his breath could set his brain on fire, pulling on chains with no will of its own.

For now, though, he needed to nurse the man back to health. All in good time.

Will spent a moment watching the waves flow and tumble like play-fighting animals, then set out to return to the cabin. Six taps to get to the door, one shift of the cane to open it, and one more tap-and-a-half before the figure in the bed turned its head ever-so-slightly to see.

Beloved injured beast.

Chapter End Notes

aaaaand scene

Assumption

Chapter Summary

Even after the wolf bares his teeth at man, his pack- his own kind- licks his wounds; there is peace to be found between lives.

Chapter Notes

Just for info purposes, any italicized dialogue is sign language, while normal dialogue is verbal speech. Hopefully that isn't too confusing to keep track of and is visible enough!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hannibal's total dependence on Will had been short-lived; he was back to eating on his own without choking, and could even lay down in bed with some help. A month of deciphering semi-conscious mumblings and pulling dead weight to the bathroom had passed in an instant. Nevertheless, the man still couldn't do everything on his own. The occasional sip of water proved almost fatal once every other day, and bathing was an ordeal that took at least half an hour, considering Will's arm. He didn't know why Hannibal insisted on doing so daily, but never complained; a dog pawing at your leg should never be ignored. The buried bones of the man's past would be dug up when he was capable of getting a verbal sentence out.

Hannibal hadn't spoken since he'd become aware of his surroundings. During Will's increasingly common sleepless nights, he could hear whispers slip from the doctor's parted lips, but all words faded with dawn. Any attempt to get Hannibal to speak was met with wide eyes that seemed to beg for something intangible, something Will could not give. He had tried to get the man to talk early in the morning or late at night- maybe having him less aware would work- but Hannibal remained unpredictable, even when exhausted and roused from sleep. One particular night, he gave Will a quick snap of the thumb, index and middle finger; Will was familiar with the movement- the gesture for "*no*" in sign. In these moments, he was grateful for learning sign language in childhood.

He'd assumed Hannibal was toying with him again, attempting to hurt Will in a way that would equate gutting him emotionally; the silence was unbearable. All that had come out of Hannibal's mouth since he'd been resuscitated was Will's name over and over again, a litany lasting for days on end. Now, the unconscious marker of Hannibal's love had disappeared. Hands smothered the lips that had once articulated such precise words; Will wanted nothing more than to pry them from his mouth. He wanted to release whatever clawed at Hannibal's throat, breaking the skin after all these years. Will had only seen glimpses of this terror back

at Castle Lecter, heard about it from Chiyoh; whatever was inside, its claws were sharp enough to draw blood, even still.

There was no malice behind Hannibal's failing voice- that much was certain- but knowing there was something painful behind it hurt, regardless. As water falls from the clouds, soaks into the soil, and evaporates back to its origin, so did the lovers exchange pain. Hannibal's hands, soft from disuse, spilled blood into Will's fertile-earth heart. He absorbed it all until all responses tasted deep-red-metallic, drawing less and less red warmth from Hannibal; a vicious cycle.

Knowing there was no intentional blood drawn from Hannibal's hands brought Will some comfort, nonetheless. They communicated through this unspoken hurt; Will was familiar with losing words, knew how it felt to lose them in the brackish sea when thought ran free across open-air plains. Hannibal asked for all he needed with simple phrases- not emotionally complex and articulate- but communication nonetheless. Whatever wounds had broken through the surface to breathe, Will would tend to them until they filled with gold. Hurt and starvation seared themselves into his skin whenever Hannibal all but glanced at him, affection and expectation in his eyes; Will faithfully attended to him, always.

~

On this day, the once-calm ocean had become unpredictable. Waves lapped at the sides of the boat, audible through the wall that lined Hannibal's bed; whenever a harsh slap followed the slow brush of a wave, Will noted how Hannibal jumped, very softly. The movement was unbelievably subtle, but it struck Will's mind like a bright white thunderbolt. This was a conversation without words: Hannibal would stir- maybe a slight twitch of the neck or rapid closing of the eyes- and Will would fight the urge to calm him. Hannibal was hiding this newfound skittishness; it reminded Will of his dogs on nights when fireworks tore up the sky. Buster would whimper and hide under the bed, while Winston would stand guard, barking and growling until another explosion pushed him over his threshold and into Will's arms. As the world slept on, Will would focus his attention on the terrified animals and soothe them with touch and silence.

Will frowned. Hannibal was not the type to be drawn towards silence, though, as it seemed only to upset him more; the slight shuffle of bedsheets could be heard at all times, soft white noise at all hours of the night. He decided on a soft hand on the shoulder when a loud snap broke the silence, finally giving him a reason to inch closer to the other man.

Hannibal's hand was slightly raised, slowly spelling out a series of letters.

"Y-s-a-y-e"

Will gave him a puzzled look, and received something more than an emotionless demand. For the first time since rebirth, he was offered a question.

"I assume you do not know who that is?"

"Yes," Will enunciated the word clearly, making sure to move his mouth and use his voice for the response; he found himself signing back to Hannibal more often than he wanted, some inescapable manifestation of his empathy, of their conjoined nature. He suppressed the urge to do so by focusing intently on the feeling of his tongue pulling back and resting between his teeth, preparing to bite if it became necessary.

"A 19-th century violinist and composer of several virtuoso-level solos. He masterfully transcribed Chopin's Ballade No.1 in G minor to violin. I'm sure you are familiar with Chopin, my dear Will," he ended with a weak smile, veiling a hint of pretentiousness.

Will bristled at the term of endearment; after all the silence and detachment, such a sudden introduction of complexity unsettled him. He noticed Hannibal spoke in sign as he did in words, imbuing each gesture with toothed knives and soft velvet- a far cry from the dry commands he'd heard for weeks on end. He wanted to fall to his knees and weep- from relief or from hurt, he did not know.

"I know the name," Will attempted to inject the words with cool detachment, "can't seem to connect it to a piece."

"Don't let it worry you, dear boy," Hannibal tilted his head upwards for a second, and signed, *"tablet, please."*

Will knew this phrase well; the familiarity was comforting. He was helpless in this sense, attached to the security incessant demands gave, but Hannibal always retained his manners. The lexical rainstorm after the drought, this and more had been pulled out of the ocean-water; Will could see the bright blood of Hannibal's mind working through his hands, requiring manners even when mute. His requests were always punctuated with a quick *"please"* or *"thank you,"* but their lack of complexity hurt constantly, naturally, like the soft rapping of trees against siding on a storm-night. The poetry Hannibal weaved in these new sentences became a tight knot in Will's stomach; why hadn't he been talking like this? What had made the commandments fall to the summit of Mount Sinai? Hannibal would have to explain, to bring them to Will as God did to Moses. They would have to exist in a universe where he and God were of the same flesh; no longer a master and servant, but two ophanim under the same burning chariot singing songs of praise to each other.

Will took a deep breath as he walked towards the opposite side of the room. They had the rest of their lives to wait as the negative space of their respective temples filled with prayers in the shape of the other- Will did not have the rest of his life to give Hannibal his tablet. He grabbed it from the drawing table by the window, and the other man eagerly took it into his hands and began typing the name of the piece. Will leaned in, close enough to brush his hair against Hannibal's cheek and trigger an imperceptible flinch. He observed Hannibal adding an accent above the "y"- Ysaÿe; the wounded regarded Will's curiosity with a smirk, setting down the tablet to free his hands.

"I cannot always communicate the complexities of written language through sign," he paused to pick the device up, then clicked the correct video after a moment of scrolling, *"but the language of music is universal among man. Embryos in the womb respond to music just as to a mother's voice."*

"I'm curious as to why you find classical so fascinating, then. Aren't instruments not as *intimate, doctor?*" Will signed the last two words, for emphasis; he wanted Hannibal to feel their sharp edges.

The response was instantaneous, "*Human hands are more reliable than the fickle voice.*"

Whenever Will returned words in sign, Hannibal talked faster. More. His sentences flowed and jumped and twisted through the air, a visual performance of much more than just requests and demands. Words were meticulously crafted with the delicate precision the doctor thrived on; not only had Hannibal's nerves been exposed, but so had his need to be understood, to be seen. It wasn't that Will wanted to deny him that- to see is an invaluable gift- but swirling-storm urges to both fight and give in to Lecter's comfort nipped at his broken heels.

"*Words are distracting,*" Will released the sentence with his hands and caught Hannibal's gaze with his eyes; the corners of the other man's mouth turned up just a little. The last rays of afternoon light coming in through the window landed on Hannibal's pointed teeth, visible as his lips and jaws parted to form a word.

"Eyes."

A quiet, raspy voice inhabited Hannibal's body, unrecognizably soft. The last time he'd heard Hannibal's voice was during the first few weeks on the boat, with the gravely injured going in and out of consciousness, repeating his daily prayers. Will had always reassured him with soft sounds and hands on heated skin. It had stopped suddenly when Will ran a warm sponge over Hannibal's back in the bath, the man relaxing and finally looking at Will with a spark of sentience. Sharp teeth had returned to his mouth, eager to tear into any soft flesh in sight.

This time, the hunger was not borne of gluttony and urge to indulge. It was the whine of a starved wolf, begging for scraps by man's fire; Will offered the creature a piece.

"*They're distracting. You see too much, you don't see enough.*"

Hannibal nodded with satisfaction, pleased to be understood regardless of the length of his spoken sentences. He directed his attention back to the tablet screen, finally allowing the violinist to play.

The ballade was a life in three acts: the first of divine suffering, the second of heavenly bliss, and the third of an end so sorrowful that none but a soulless man could withstand. Will was moved by the placement of each note, its intentionality; nothing was by mistake in music. Its structure was a story to be told over and over again, unaltered by human error and time, unless transcribed. Any error, any change, was intentional. Will wondered if Hannibal would ever play this for him- bliss intertwined with sorrow, found only by those looking for beauty in pain.

While all of these quiet revelations wrote themselves into his head, Will found the piece's emotion by observing Hannibal; he sat completely still, eyes closed and hands twitching. His fingers struck chords in time with the accompanist, his face changing with the intensity of each phrase, much like how it moved with his thoughts. Hannibal was a man unreadable to others, but the subtlety of his expressions- the movement of his eyebrows by mere

centimetres, millimetres, nanometres- spoke aloud to Will like a sermon. The shine of tears at the joining of eyelids seemed a waterfall, a flood of the soul wiping the surface clear of all sin. The piece's coda alternated between despairing shrieks and quiet sobs, ending with the aftershocks of tears. Each change induced a shiver in Hannibal's body; Will imagined his skin would prickle under tape and bandages, just as his own did so many times. The wounds Hannibal gave him were always accompanied by cold and loneliness- in a cell, in a hospital, on a surgical table about to be defaced. Hannibal would not spend his days healing alone, and neither would Will; no tear would fall unnoticed, no cry left unanswered. Even after the wolf bares his teeth at man, his pack- his own kind- licks his wounds; there is peace to be found between lives.

Cautiously, Will extended a hand and placed a finger right under Hannibal's eye, letting a tear flow from his eyelashes to the hard pad of Will's fingertip. Watery hazel eyes fluttered open and gazed with affection at the one that dried them. Almost instinctively, Hannibal leaned into the touch, pressing his face to the brunette's rough palm. Will took this as an invitation for more touch, more closeness, and allowed the flood to pass through them both as he pulled the man's head flush to his chest. Hannibal went still.

Will recalled how turning a shark onto its back could stun it temporarily; was Hannibal helpless by choice? He felt that if something in Hannibal's mind had been flipped over, it would never go unacknowledged. All thoughts and impulses would be combed through thoroughly; if Hannibal offered himself up to Will like this, it had purpose. Nothing was by mere mistake in a cannibal's flesh-tearing love.

The injured lover let out an open-mouthed sigh, hot breath blowing like summer wind over Will's thinly-clothed chest. The world was fixed to one point right now, to him, just for a moment. Will pinned down that Hannibal walked the line between conscious and unconscious vulnerability- the immediate peace of being stunned into silence melting into the relief of showing another where scars and skin fuse.

A beat of silence bounced between the two and reverberated throughout the room, echoes of music disappearing with the sun below the horizon. The world was preparing for the coming of night. While creatures of land settled into their nests, lovers at sea fell into a silent embrace, still and hushed.

Will felt Hannibal's breathing synchronize with his own slow, shallow breaths. He expected such intimacy to make his heart want to burst; instead, all he wanted was to drown in this sweet and easy peace- to feel the weight of Hannibal's head against his chest and the glossiness of ashen hair under his hand. He had begun rocking both back and forth with the waves, calming them both until Hannibal's eyes shot open.

Water had hit the boat again; this time, the man's heart did not race and his nerves did not fire with fear. He pressed his nose against the bony center of Will's chest, taking in the scent of aftershave before pulling away. Will watched Hannibal's subdued reaction to the water-sound; the tiger could be soothed by touch, after all.

Hannibal shook a closed fist with his thumb tucked between the middle and index finger.
“*Bathroom.*”

Will gave a long sigh, icy disappointment coursing through his veins. Whatever warmth they just shared had escaped through the cracks of their respective walls, “No longer worthy of hearing your opinion on Bach and Bernini?”

“Not unless you sign, dearest Will.”

“Could I ask why?” The push and pull of call and response- maybe it could be settled without teeth.

“It helps,” came the verbal answer, still softer than Will had ever known.

“It helps you talk more?”

Hannibal nodded. *“I can say more verbally. I also feel more inclined to speak my mind to you with full honesty.”*

He considered asking the doctor if he felt more listened to, understood, but anticipated the exchange would be like pulling teeth. Will was not about to interrogate the psychiatrist about his emotions, buried in the wet-earth catacombs of his mind. Been there, done that.

“Bathroom?” Will asked to confirm, and the doctor nodded again, letting exhaustion seep into the previously-tensed muscles around his eyes. Will slipped a hand under Hannibal's knees and allowed the man to wrap his arms around his neck. The position kept Hannibal's ribs free from dangerous pressure, but also gave him room to stuff his nose into the dip between Will's shoulder and collarbone. He felt Hannibal try to steady his breaths on the walk to the bathroom, wincing with pain at each sudden jolt or misstep. He seemed more rescued stray than man, burying his face in Will's soft cotton shirt and calming at his familiar scent; it was endearing. The wound hidden inside Hannibal's heart, however infinitesimal, bled violently and pooled in Will's hands with warmth. He would drink the blood-offering if he could, acting in return as a benevolent maker protecting his vulnerable creations from harm.

The bathroom was not large, and dragging Hannibal's body into the small tub had proved challenging in the early weeks, even for one as strong as Will. Now, as Hannibal became more mobile, he could place the man on a seat. Hannibal kept himself upright on his own, watching carefully as Will prepared the bathwater. The doctor was very strict in this area; after Hannibal regained consciousness, he would huff with disapproval whenever Will prepared the water with star-anise soap instead of a simple balsamic-scented bath. Hannibal preferred more subtle, woody scents for comfort, Will came to find, his own aftershave being the only exception. Otherwise, all the cosmetics Will had kept from his previous life in Wolf Trap were well-loved by all.

Will turned on the bath faucet, letting it flow slowly to keep the water from barraging the tub floor. His own distress with noise had always been present, but Hannibal's heightened sensitivity towards sound and movement had not. Luckily, Will found it unnaturally natural to ease the jerkiness of his movements or the volume of his throat-clearing to accommodate Hannibal. He poured lavender soap onto the rising layer of water, letting the purple-tinted liquid disperse evenly, and signed to Hannibal to start undressing; the injured man would remove what he could before Will helped. Hannibal moved without grace, but retained some dignity when he managed to remove his loose sweater while remaining upright. Will watched

him from the corner of his eye, putting a hand under the steady stream of water, in and out, finding a rhythm to which he could check the temperature.

Will went to pick up the clothes Hannibal had dumped unceremoniously on the ground. He knelt to grab it; as he went to stand, Hannibal trapped his hand in the soft crimson bundle, pulling him close.

This piece of clothing had once been but a lamb. Its wool had been taken from its body and dyed blood-red to adorn Hannibal's heart; Will placed a hand over it, feeling the fast but steady beat. Little mannerisms revealed themselves on the daily, sometimes sending a surge of prey-fear through Will's veins- in this moment, being caught by surprise and held still- but Hannibal's physiology dispelled any such thoughts. His hand was still held fast, but Will no longer cared; he would never be the next lamb. The monster's heart was racing in his presence, heavy thumps moving Will's hand with each beat, as if trying to shake off a predator's claws with weak, trembling fingers. A tiny flesh-and-blood creature lived beneath the muscled heart, yet to be pried fully open.

As Hannibal pressed his head to Will's, the other's heart beating just as fast, Will ran a hand over the raised white lines of transformation that graced Hannibal's chest. They were barely visible beneath pepper-gray hair, cared for well; different, yet so extremely similar to his own. Hannibal would never know the moment Will saw them, the roped scars along his chest and the faint stripe just below his navel, on their first night in the cream-tile bathroom. Hannibal would never know how Will held his broken body in his arms after breath returned to his lungs. Hannibal would never know how Will sat by his bedside day and night, waiting for some semblance of consciousness to return to his eyes. Hannibal would never know the gasp that left Will's throat when he saw those scars under lathered soap. Hannibal would never know the tears that fell from Will's eyes when there were no words to soften the blow, to tell the stories behind each scar, to explain. He would know one day, just as Will hoped he would know the story of Hannibal's own becoming; for now, their true forms stood before each other, unabashed.

Will attempted to calm his own hammering heart and directed his energy to Hannibal's comfort. He pulled his hand from the now-loose grip, and knelt at the man's feet. This part of the process was easy; pants only complicated tending to injuries. An unthinking reflex, Will tugged at the waistline of Hannibal's underwear, bringing it down past his feet and dropping it where the sweater had landed seconds earlier. Will kept his focus on unwrapping the bandages that kept dressings in place. He noted that only a handful of wounds had managed to weep through their gauze today, and most of the bruises were healing well. They resembled where oil-paint clouds catch the sun, bleeding and blurring under the brush of a baroque-era master.

"Ready?" Will raised his eyes expectantly.

"It's oddly quiet."

Hannibal was right. The bathroom wasn't right next to the waves; one could hear every breath exchanged in the cold-tile room. Will blinked for a minute, wondering what Hannibal was asking for, *"Does that bother you?"*

"Silence and sound both bore holes in the floor of my mind. I believe something between the two would fill them well."

Will ran a hand over Hannibal's leg, watching as it twitched to escape the dull pain. He slid it up to the man's chest, letting his hand enter the purgatory between inhale and exhale. After giving it a moment of consideration, he swept Hannibal up into his arms yet again, placing him gently into the full tub. Hannibal's ear twitched in response to the faint dribble of water past the brim, to Will pulling a sponge out of the water and squeezing- to the space between silence and sound.

"The repetitiveness of ocean waves can drive a man to insanity, but the pitter-patter of rain and water soothes all," Hannibal's hands slipped against each other, flicking tiny droplets into the expanse of clear water below as he spoke.

Will let the sponge sit on the surface, hoping the water tension held as his hands moved. He commented with haste, *"Anything can be a battering ram if you work hard enough."*

"That is true. Although water not only batters and breaks- it floods the streets. Not a house nor concert hall is spared."

Will picked up the sponge and began to wash Hannibal's bruised skin. The doctor winced at each pass of the sponge over any tender area, and breathed a sigh of relief whenever Will resorted to gently dabbing any open wounds instead of scrubbing. A thin stream of water continued to fall from the faucet, releasing steam as it struck the surface. Gas and liquid combined in mid-air with each breath and heavy sigh; the humidity stuck to Will's skin and weighed down his shoulder-length curls.

He brought his hands up to Hannibal's neck, opting to use them over the sponge. Hannibal's hair had gotten longer, too, although it was not styled with purpose as it had been in Florence. Each strand grew naturally; some stuck out a bit at the top of his head, although his bangs had grown back after a few weeks out of the BSHCI. Alana must have employed a barber of some sort, but they never managed to channel the precision Hannibal applied to every aspect of his appearance.

Will leaned towards the man's ear, pushing back a wisp of damp hair to continue the conversation, whisper-soft, "Are your streets flooded?"

He jumped- a movement that Will had learned to pick up, barely visible- at the sound of his partner's voice. Hannibal settled when he registered the steady hand on his back, sighing, *"Water cleanses. It carries away all that brings senseless destruction, carves out new unsoiled land."*

Will cupped bathwater in one hand to pour over Hannibal's head, shielding the man's eyes with another. "Does water not cause destruction of its own?"

"Destruction is subjective. God sent the Great Flood to erase all sin from Earth's surface, after all."

"A flood with nothing behind it seems kinder. No mysterious heavenly agenda, no make-believe sins against some all-powerful being," Will let the last handful of water trickle down, "just some floating debris and wet ground."

Hannibal's eyes fluttered open once the water passed them, blinking it from his lashes as he looked up at the other, *"You have no ark to take shelter in then, Will. Nature does not give warnings like humanity's God."*

"I prefer nature's mindless violence over God's conscious vengeance," Will mused. With that, he pressed both hands into Hannibal's hair and worked in shampoo until the graying brown was painted soap-white. Will's easy movements and lack of hesitation acted as a lullaby; Hannibal let go.

Tendrils of steam rose from the water, wrapping themselves around Hannibal's half-submerged body and crawling up Will's rolled-up sleeves. The scene reminded him of an incense-filled cathedral; Hannibal was a holy statue, barely blinking as his eyes fell shut under Will's touch. He may have been injured, but what strength lay beneath the skin was undeniable. Will knew Hannibal was not made of stone- he was human, in the physical sense- but even as the skin warmed under his touch, Hannibal's body seemed immaculate. The only thing to convince Will of Hannibal's mortality was not his journey to the brink of death, but the existence of the simple circadian rhythm. Bathing Hannibal was a sacred experience when he was conscious and talkative- Will had no other words to describe it. The feeling bordered on divine vision when Hannibal's breaths evened out, growing deep and slow, as in sleep. A smile crept up to Will's mouth, and a surge of affection filled his chest; Hannibal was but a man. He was not a Greek statue, barely a god, just a creature falling asleep in his arms during a warm bath. For once he wasn't asleep from injury or medication, but from pure contentedness.

Will continued to bathe him, giving gentle shushes and murmuring little words of reassurance whenever Hannibal stirred. He focused on moving the man as little as possible, remembering how he used to comfort distressed rescues back in Wolf Trap: keep them still, keep them warm, and keep them calm. A scared dog could and would bite if provoked; the occasional "good boy" and head scratch were never unwelcome to avoid that outcome. Although Hannibal wasn't scared right now, any sudden movement could rip his slow-beating heart out of the safe rib-cage of sleep.

As Hannibal grew heavier in his arms with each gentle word, Will decided to get him back to bed. He sat on the edge of the tub, bringing a towel near and drying the dripping strands of Hannibal's hair before wrapping the towel around his waist. It took some effort to pull him up, but Hannibal woke just enough to sit beside Will on the tub's edge. He patted the other man dry, making sure to hold him upright. Steam billowed out of the room through the door, allowing cold into their shelter; Will draped a striped bathrobe over Hannibal to keep him warm as he dressed the man's wounds. Regardless, he shivered. Will wasn't sure if it was from the cool air or his touch, but Hannibal did not seem in a place to answer that question; he had only started responding in full sentences today.

Once the wounds had been taken care of, Will let his thumb glide over the other man's palm to get his attention. Hannibal's hands were firm but soft, bordering on frailty. Will regarded

his own hands for a moment. They were rough, but the calloused finger-pads held reservoirs of soft pink flesh just beneath the surface; a protective shell. His godly reign would soon come to an end.

A reflex- Hannibal wrapped his arms around Will's neck to hold on again as the brunette lifted him. He wondered what it must've felt like to be carried in Hannibal's arms- Will silently cursed Mason for knocking him unconscious during the failed operation at Muskrat farm. At least now, Hannibal would know what it was like to be carried and cared for. He relished in it; Will could sense it. He always nestled himself close to Will's neck, pressed ghosts of kisses to the exposed skin, stared into Will's eyes as his pupils dilated in reaction to his scent. Will- pine balsam and warm spice- was a sign of comfort, of pain disappearing into the flurry of dreams and soft caresses in the night; Will knew this well. Hannibal went from articulate man to helpless creature in a matter of minutes in his presence, as if trained. While this change would have been terrifying to him years ago, it fascinated Will now. He wanted to hold Hannibal in his arms and watch his reaction to every little thing- to language, to music, to pleasure, and most of all, to him.

As he placed Hannibal in the bed and pulled the covers up to his waist, Will wondered how soon they'd be able to share the space without caution and veiled meaning. Hannibal would say that loud noises hurt him, and Will would close the windows on stormy nights. Hannibal would ask to be held, and Will would embrace him instead of keeping vigil at the bedside. He prayed Hannibal would not fear the touch-starved animal that had clawed its way out from under his skin and into Will's arms. Maybe he didn't fear it- maybe he feared how it hid behind great palace doors or devoured all the love it could get at its own discretion, without conscious permission. All Will could do was wonder until he coaxed it out more; he understood the feeling of having the very foundations of your mind shaken and betrayed by the body.

The room was washed in gold lamplight; Will's trigger-switch finger plunged it into darkness. Hannibal shifted around for a moment, gingerly lifting up his torso to adjust his legs. While the doctor got comfortable, Will pulled up a chair from the far corner of the room. His knees knocked against the bedframe as he sat down close enough to see the injured man's chest move in the dark, close enough to wrap his fingers around Hannibal's hand. He gave a light squeeze, earning an appreciative smile in response.

Hannibal wriggled his hand free to give his last request of the day, "*Stay with me.*"

Will nodded mutely and took back the free hand, watching the sharp shine in Hannibal's eyes disappear as they shut to rest. Before reclining in the chair to prepare for another restless night, Will signed back to Hannibal, blind in repose, "*Where else would I go?*"

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading chapter 2 in which i originally planned to have hannibal fall off the toilet but decided no amount of poetic language could make it not funny

Presentation

Chapter Summary

Will came to his side without being asked, without a word being spoken, with only Hannibal's restless whimpers filling the cabin of their own volition. Hannibal wondered if Will's soothing words came from the stem of his brain, just as his own fear-responses; how much was involuntary, how much was conscious?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will accompanied Hannibal on the way to the other side of the room, where dawn light bathed a humble breakfast for two. Hannibal could walk now, albeit for short distances and with support; this was the first time he would be sitting at the table to eat. He'd tried rejecting Will's help at first, opting for the only cane onboard instead. It had belonged to Will, but he'd recovered full mobility quickly, only grabbing the cane when awoken in the small hours of the night. Hannibal was grateful for that; he couldn't bear to have his feet hang useless beneath him, even with Will's arms holding them above ground.

The cane had worked quite well for a while; Hannibal was able to walk from his bed to the desk and back. He'd only required a few pauses along the way to shift the cane from hand to hand when he put too much weight on one foot. He decided that the short bursts of intense pain were better than the dull ache that sitting with Will by his bed gave his heart. Hannibal's skin prickled whenever Will redressed his wounds- not from the pull of adhesive or tearing of skin, but from the warm touch of Will's hand. The fiery tenderness burrowed beneath his muscles and touched his very marrow; if he were to cut open his bones, pure love-scorched ash would fall out.

When the flames of devotion burned too bright and the air grew too smoke-stained to endure, Hannibal longed to leave the little room where his world turned on its drawing-desk cane-step axis. The whim struck often after an exceptionally good meal on Will's part- today was the first of many.

The previous weeks' meals had consisted of fruit-flavored oatmeal, some emergency tack and whatever poor creature Will managed to fish out of the ocean that day. Hannibal thanked the world for at least providing Will with fishing skills and anything besides plain, unflavored oatmeal. Artificial flavoring is heavenly when you're barely alive, but what sat before him was pure manna compared to that; Will had prepared a simple yet wonderful sausage-egg scramble. Hannibal did not question where the ingredients were from, but their recent stop at an off-the-grid port city was a possibility; Will had picked the pigs well.

One side of his body supported by a cane, the other by Will's extended arm, Hannibal shuffled his way over to the desk-turned-table. He planted an arm on it to lower himself onto a cushioned seat, feeling Will's arm let him go. He watched Will's curls bounce as he sat across the table, grunting with the effort. Dust motes moved and shone, catching in their hair and clothes like flies in a web; the world was still enough to allow it.

Hannibal only noticed Will was waiting for him to eat as he picked up the fork; Will then did the same- only a second behind him- but still watching. Hannibal allowed a faint smile to cross his face as Will's eyes tracked the fork to his mouth and back to the table, eagerly awaiting a response.

A moment passed as Hannibal set the fork down to speak, *"Are you so eager to hear words of praise, Will?"*

"Only if they're honest words of praise," he admitted, then swallowed.

Hannibal spared Will any admonishment towards his cooking, instead going for less bruising honesty, *"This is a much-appreciated departure from a diet of microwaved oatmeal."*

"One meal doesn't make a diet," Will's head twitched a bit as he signed, defensiveness evident in hurried hands.

"I digress. Breakfast serves to energize us for all the day's activities; is that not more valuable than a grand dinner wasted by sleep?"

Will huffed and took another forkful of fluffed egg to his mouth, *"Depends on what you value."*

"I often value the heart over the mind, as I'm sure you know."

"Except in matters of breakfast?" He saw Will's lips tense, forcing back a playful show of teeth. The man was questioning- no- toying with Hannibal's values. He would have to stand his own, albeit with poor armor.

"You assume breakfast is a meal for the mind and dinner for the heart."

"Given your reasoning, yes," Will cocked his head; Hannibal could almost smell the excited delight that bloomed from the man's chest like a fresh wound.

"Then you assume wrong. All meals have an equal share of heart and mind put into them; dinner is no stranger to tedious preparation, and breakfast is intimately familiar with a loving hand's touch. Anyone who does not see that is a fool."

Will leaned back in the chair, bringing a hand up to his hair and threading it through unbrushed strands with a sigh, *"You're the only man I know who can judge someone's morals by a meal."*

"All but yours, my Will."

Hannibal received an acid-burn smile in return. He watched as Will focused his world back onto the delicate clinking of silverware against porcelain plates, eyes closing to touch the little noises.

They ate in relative silence, allowing Will's demeanor to soften. His eyes no longer pierced the thin suit of armor Hannibal donned, instead melting each link of chainmail one by one. Hannibal preferred this; falling apart thread by thread felt more controlled than a complete, sudden uncoiling. He could watch as it happened, watch as Will undid knots and unraveled miles upon miles of knit fabric-fields.

Once Will had finished most of the meal, Hannibal noticed how he defaulted to twirling the fork in his hand. Reflected light flew over their faces as Will flashed a calculated, albeit warm, smile. *"Is it safe to assume you just said this meal was made by **my** loving hand?"*

Hannibal signed with increased momentum, a concealed rush, *"It comes out in the flavor."*

"The notes of forest floor beneath a full-bodied Pinot Noir," Will, on the other hand, slowed his pace with bold-brushstroke confidence. He painted pictures of damp soil and thick red liquid in the air, so bright that Hannibal could almost taste it; Will's imagination was marvelous, as always.

"Precisely. It is a mellow sweetness, lacking fever but boasting warmth."

Will's eyes narrowed in thought, until he signed back, quick and light, *"I almost burnt the sausage."*

Hannibal raised his eyes to the sight of Will looking up at him through batting lashes, drawing out an eye-crinkling smile.

"That must be it, then."

Genuine fondness passed between them in that moment, and the pair returned to their meals.

Hannibal cleared his plate first, spending the next few minutes looking out the cabin window. He couldn't see the waves while sitting, but the gentle up-down of the clouds was enough for him to tell he was afloat. A lone albatross flew above them, miles of open sky beneath-northbound.

"It never occurred to me to ask, Will, but where are we heading to?"

When Hannibal received no response, he snapped his fingers; Will's head shot up, frantically signing a flurry of *"wait"* and *"again, please?"* as he paused to chew and set down his fork.

"Where are we going, Will?"

Hannibal watched as he waited to sign before swallowing, regarding it as a curiosity, this social algorithm for manners Will applied to any situation. There was no need to wait, but the man avoided pursuing any formalities that could interfere with Will's comfort; in this life, there was also no need to note every collision between spoon and teacup.

Will swallowed, Adam's apple bobbing before he gave a deliberated response, "*Chiyoh helped us find a safe place in Ireland. All we need is shelter.*"

"*Chiyoh has done an admirable job of keeping you safe, Will. I hope to see her soon.*"

Will heard, but danced around the request, instead informing Hannibal about the current state of affairs. "*She'll be taking my boat back to the States once we get off.*"

"*Surely, you would enjoy her company a while longer?*" Hannibal received an icy glare in return; for all her help, Will was not fond of the woman. Hannibal hardly ever caught her scent on him, let alone in the air. He assumed relations were not amicable at the moment, and attempted to steer the conversation elsewhere.

"*Why Ireland, might I ask?*"

"*Seems like a nice place. Lots of cliffs and cairns,*" Will paused, risking a look, "*I think it suits you.*"

"*I'm glad the symbolism of cairns is not lost on you, Will,*" Hannibal gave a warm smile to talk of death. "*They are both a burial mound and a marker for those passing by.*"

"*The two purposes are one and the same, aren't they?*"

"*We bury our past and navigate a new future; Cairns are the perfect embodiment of rebirth and finding hope in loss. If death comes from life, and life from death, then they could be called the same,*" Hannibal wrapped a hand around his knife and fork to take them to the kitchen, signing the rest one-handed, "*It is merely semantics.*"

Will gave a half-listening nod, remarking, "*We still have to find a house, you know.*"

"*Of course,*" Hannibal instinctively grabbed his plate and went to stand, a blinding rush of pain shooting through his legs; he sat back down with a gasp. The doctor made no other movements as Will took the plate for him, expression unreadable sans a glimmer of melancholy, and brought it to the small kitchen a door away from the bed-cabin.

These moments alone, without Will, were the most unbearable of all. Hannibal would not usually mind silence; he'd gotten used to it after thirty-five years in solitude. His silence was no longer pure, though; Will ran whispering down those empty halls, a permanent resident of his inner world. But having just the imago left him hungry and weak; no mind-palace form of Will could nourish him as the sea-blood-skin form could. Will was no imagined deity; he was as real as the heart beating in his chest, as real as the prayers people sing to their gods. As long as he was incapable of walking independently, as long as he continued his davening, bowing worship, Will would stay.

The sink handle squeaked as Hannibal heard him turn on the water from the kitchen, letting it flow over the two plates; Hannibal listened from the drawing table as he scraped them clean. Will was not a man who left them to soak, just as he; one and the same. It was not long before Will returned, coffee cup in hand.

As Will crossed to the other side of the table, he placed his hand over Hannibal's before sitting down with a groan. They stayed like that, hands resting together, until Hannibal broke the silence, starting, *"Irish real estate is quite profitable these days, it would be a shame to waste such an opportunity for house-hunting."*

"I've been looking into a few places," Will took a sip, closing his eyes at the pleasant heat emanating from the mug.

Hannibal remained respectfully quiet, eventually raising an eyebrow as the other failed to elaborate; Will did not notice.

"Will," Hannibal cleared his throat, sore from the sudden awakening, "I would like to see."

He saw Will's eyes land on his lips, hesitating as he hovered his mug above the table.

"You may finish your coffee first."

Will nodded, relieved, drawing his hand from Hannibal's to enclose the mug and return to his close-eyed state.

He sighed. Just days ago, sitting in silence with Will was equally as unbearable as time without him. The safety he felt in Will's presence had become generalized; where he had only felt at ease while being carried, he now felt peace at Will's very footsteps. The need for medicine and rest had blurred into the need for touch and affection- not just cold, unfeeling treatment.

Hannibal did not consider himself a conflicted man; that role had suited Will well enough throughout their time as acquaintances. He loathed how he could not predict himself as of late; he couldn't catch whenever he leaned into Will's touch, or held onto him tighter than was necessary. The precise control he had exercised over every aspect of his outer self was not necessary around Will on this boat, in this room. His inner self, on the other hand, churned like the tumultuous sea on black stormy nights; this was no revelation. Whatever layers hadn't been ripped away by the cliffside sea had been all but surgically removed on this boat by Will's hands, leaving whatever lay beneath spraying wildly, a sliced artery.

This boat was the birthplace of new life, a breeding ground for golden revelation. Its humble layout did not suit Hannibal's tongue, but his spirit no longer hungered for superficial bread and water; Will's body and blood were all he craved. His first few weeks here had barely registered in his mind anyway, a mess of sleep and sweetness that only his body remembered. More of the experience had taken place through touch than through thought; his body knew Will a caretaker, a lover, keeping him alive and free from pain that released strangled cries in the dead of night. Hannibal had no choice but to accept when Will held him; animal instinct sat crouching below the surface, gnashing teeth and taking the sweet flesh Will offered. But he did not bite; the creature hidden in grass felt the wind's sweet caress before it hunted.

Will's mug made a hollow-ceramic sound as he placed it on the table, settling. Hannibal caught his gaze as he glanced up again.

"Shall we look at these potential homes?"

Will went to retrieve Hannibal's tablet. He placed it flat on the table, standing over Hannibal as they looked through pages upon pages of homes-to-be. Options were relatively slim; the world seemed to be filled with single-person guesthouses and tourist mansions, none of which would be suitable for their needs. Hannibal spent a fair number of minutes without clicking even one of Will's choices, skimming over anything that was even remotely reminiscent of grandiose opulence.

"Luxury hilltop castles don't suit your refined tastes?" Will asked, almost mocking.

"I am simply considering our safety. We cannot be as obvious as I would wish, but I will ensure our house meets my standards."

"Of course you will," Will remarked, undecided between sneering or supporting. Hannibal was ignoring all of his selections, but for good reason.

After another beat of thoughtful silence, *"Have you lost your affinity for solitude, Will? I cannot find a trace of Wolf Trap in these choices."*

"Simply considering our safety," Will commented, echoing the other.

Hannibal tilted his head, mouth upturned, *"It seems we may have to compromise, dear."*

"What do you consider a compromise?"

He erased all the previous choices and opened a filter for criteria. Will knelt down beside him, propping his elbows up on the table as the pair looked over some options.

Hannibal tracked Will's finger as he pointed to a pleasing cooking setup, then transformed his finger from a pointer to a mouth, *"A modern kitchen."*

"I would expect no less," Hannibal marked the option, an array of marble-top counters appearing onscreen. *"Patio, perhaps?"*

"Something more private would be nice."

As expected, Will still gravitated towards isolation from the outside world. He didn't state it explicitly; they both knew their living arrangements needed to be discreet. While Hannibal did not enjoy total isolation without the thrum of human movement, he couldn't complain; it was a benefit, if they were to be on the run. The idea seemed appealing, moreso now than it had ever been. Living alongside high society, with all of its status and beauty, felt more artificial by the day; Hannibal did not want to don a human veil in his own home. Hannibal's personal idea of comfortable seclusion aligned more with the cliffside residence back on the Maryland coast; his eyes lit up with the thought, *"Oceanfront, private beach."*

Will juggled the idea in the space between his eyes, considering; he nodded and let Hannibal continue looking.

"I assume two bedrooms are to be expected."

"Three," added Will, without hesitation.

Curiously, Hannibal asked, *"more room for adopted strays?"*

Will stiffened. *"For any person who could happen to wander in. Or any adopted strays, yeah."*

He decided not to prod much farther, noting how Will bristled with unease, *"Company wouldn't want to feel unwelcome, I agree."*

"S'good you consider dogs company," Will relaxed slightly; Hannibal could entertain talk of the friends his beloved left behind.

"They are man's best friend for a reason."

Will chuckled, *"I'd say man is a dog's best friend, from experience,"* he continued as Hannibal gave a puzzled look, *"they barely know food from a choking hazard, trust me."*

Hannibal swiftly looked from Will to the screen, taking in a deep breath, *"A three-bedroom house, then?"*

"Yes. Renovated kitchen, oceanfront, three bedrooms, and a highly-specific interior design style that suits both our needs."

"Perfect," Hannibal glossed over Will's sarcasm and watched as the screen filled with the broad criteria; most of the results seemed to be bright, modern spaces, an abundance of white-plaster walls and pale wooden furniture. While not unappealing, most were unexceptional. Will seemed to agree, eyes not resting on any listing for more than a fraction of a second.

A quaint little place, painted white and rested atop a rocky bluff, caught Hannibal's eye. While not magnificent, it was no cottage; a private drive and a good few acres of land came with the property, surrounded by dark, roiling water. Will went to scroll through pictures of the interior, finding Hannibal's attention focused on the listing. The sellers presented the house kitchen-first. A large wood-counter island sat inside the space, sandwiched between display cases and dark cabinets. A tasteful tiled mosaic served as a backdrop to the stove hood; it was a creatively-designed space, that much was evident.

Hannibal noticed Will watching him out of the corner of his eye, possibly searching for his approval, and continued to admire the build. The other living spaces, while full of light from large wall-to-floor windows, retained a dark, mellow atmosphere about them. Walls were painted various shades of pale gray and blue, except for the two master bedrooms, which remained grayscale; the guest room matched the rest of the house.

"The bedrooms are unremarkable relative to the rest."

Will's face twitched, teeth showing with a mixture of annoyance and amusement, *"And you're going to let that dissuade you?"*

"No. However, it factors into our decision," he stated with calm defensiveness.

"Hannibal, we won't find much better than this. You can make whatever changes you want to the place once we-," Will paused, hands fumbling as if to reverse time on their own, *"if we go there."*

"You've bought it already," it was more of a confirmation than a question; Hannibal watched with adoration as Will confessed, eyes fixed on him.

"Best one I found. All the others were just for you to look through," he took a step back from the table and turned to the window, *"knew you wouldn't like them."*

"Clever boy. Shall we test your capacity to read minds, then?"

"Try."

"Tell me Will, what is my greatest desire?"

He did not hesitate. *"In life? To live fully, and be fully understood,"* his eyes traveled towards the floor, *"I hope you have at least one."*

The words were soft; Will's hands moved with a tenderness he did not usually show through sign. The bristling life returned to them with the next revelation, *"Now? You need to see the ocean."*

Perceptive as ever; Judas, bold and unconflicted. Hannibal no longer flinched from the betrayer's kiss of understanding. He smiled with approval, pulling himself up to stand, *"I am happy to inform you that at least one of those is correct."*

Will laughed, taking Hannibal's arm around his neck to support him, *"Bring the cane."*

~

A parasite by the name of purgatory nested in Hannibal's bed. It burrowed itself into the layered sheets like a fox hiding from dogs, still and breathless as paws thundered above. What lie outside- before and after the hunt- was yet to be known.

This was the time between dusk and dawn. All that moved was the ceaseless rocking of waves- a mother's loving arms. This mother in particular was not of milk and cloth; wire sprung from her curves and pierced her infant's soft flesh, drawing blood and tears. She tasted of salt and sweat, of rot and decay- the ocean, matriarch and menace. Not even mother Mary could match the fervor with which the sea enveloped its children.

Hannibal had been reborn from the ocean's womb; he at least owed her the joy of cradling and cooing to him. While his days were filled with her harsh discipline, mere slaps and splashes that ran up and down his spine, his nights were of fire and brimstone. This torture came under the guise of a lullaby, a prayer of adoration. The sound and sensation of the waves below him kept Hannibal in a half-waking inferno, mind heavy from rest and body tense from fear. When he would gain enough awareness to realize the source of his distress, Will would already be caressing his arm and giving gentle affirmations of safety and sleep. The fact that his body so clearly expressed this fear was humiliating; he could not control it.

He was aware of his need to control, to be Atlas holding up the sky and arranging each constellation as desired; nevertheless, a loss of it tore up whatever safety-skin he had nestled into.

Behind the humiliation, though, lay a gratitude towards his nervous system for reacting on instinct. Will came to his side without being asked, without a word being spoken, with only Hannibal's restless whimpers filling the cabin of their own volition. Hannibal wondered if Will's soothing words came from the stem of his brain, just as his own fear-responses; how much was involuntary, how much was conscious? Some of it may have been borne of Will's empathy- a uniquely human trait, valued by many and wielded by few. The fact that Will turned his empathy towards his shaking form made Hannibal shiver with curiosity; the man could crawl his way into even his mind's most primitive, deep-seated heart.

Even then, empathy could only explain so much. Something akin to love was festering inside Will's sacred heart; Hannibal could smell the burnt-flesh wine dripping from pumping muscle. Will's saintly form contained it well, committing all acts except the simple gesture of pointing towards the flaming heart. Hannibal wished to guide the hand towards the fire, fix it there, and paint a portrait of the holy man before he dissolved into the wings of a ghost-dove.

Hannibal spent most nights fighting to keep his shape, a determined salt-crystal against water's unforgiving rhythm. He floated through limbo for hours on end; only after he gave up the fight did he find Will at the bedside. To give up was to enter the heaven that was Will Graham; to fight and win was to fall into a dreamless sleep. It was not often that Hannibal woke so suddenly without the fight between sleep and waking; it was also not often that he woke so far from Will.

His eyelids made a faint noise as they unstuck, presenting the dark room to the man whom they belonged to. His muscles' steady fear-contractions left his body sore and screaming for a soft yet firm hand to soothe them; such a hand was nowhere to be found. Will sat curled-up at the drawing desk, legs tangled in the space between chair and arm. His breaths were slow and shallow with sleep; Hannibal could only see them from the movement of Will's shoulders behind the chair-back. It had become a rare occurrence for Will to have his back turned towards him, and as such became a chance for Hannibal's well-concealed streak of impulsivity to rear its dreaded head.

He spent a moment watching the sky bob up and down through the window. This was an opportunity for freedom- one that Hannibal could not afford to lose. He and Will had gone out earlier today; Hannibal had spent most of his freedom leaning over the railing to observe the glistening ocean surface. Will had spent this time wrapping his arms around Hannibal's waist, grip tightening as the doctor neared the water for fear of letting go. Every inch closer to the surface was a catalyst for Will's tighter grip, his tenser touch, the harsh pull away from the railing. The feeling bordered on suffocation, but Hannibal bathed in it; Will wanted him close. Hannibal's chains rattled against his cage, branding Will's touch into his skin, crackling and burning. This beautiful searing pain was not the Verger brand, but the mark of Cain- protecting from all harm, giving everlasting life. Will's divine wrath would bestow this punishment upon him wearing a gift's disguise, for eternal life is only eternal suffering. What gives stained glass meaning if not the darkness before the illumination?

Hannibal rose from the propped-up pillow, picking up his legs to hang them over the bed; he would stretch his wings without ties of elbow-twine keeping them still. The cane lay motionless on the floor- untidy, likely on Will's part. Hannibal reached for its curved handle and pulled himself up; his feet were unsteady and curled under his weight. Still, Hannibal managed to shuffle across the wood floor as he neared the door.

A cool, salty breeze pressed against the roof of his mouth, heavy and damp. Using the doorway as leverage, Hannibal pushed forward; he only lost his grip on the cane when he reached the slight dip at the center of the deck. The depression caught the cane-foot, sending it flying across the floor and delivering his back against the dark wood ground. Hannibal Lecter was now a being of breathless lungs, sky-pointed eyes and crumbling-marble bones.

He could see the stars.

Chapter End Notes

i will do all i have in my power to inflict righteous pain on hannibal the cannibal lecturer

all of my godly author-power is put into making him trip every once in a while

and so i am sated by blood

(blood being the occasional "ow")

Finding

Chapter Summary

In this deafening silence, so loud it could damage one's ears till death, the two mourners found peace in what should only cause pain.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Every soft-shelled capsule of night was another moment without Will, another wound picked of its freshly-made scabs. Will always slept in the chair beside Hannibal's bed, at the desk, an inch too far; Hannibal's aching arms could not reach out. He kicked and screamed in the dark recesses of his mind to be set free; whatever held him was not the familiar pulse of blood or cold stone walls, but false-sweet skin and wet warmth. The mother-ocean brought no comfort as he tossed and turned for hours on end, the only way to ease the pain being escape. When waves of nausea from this terrible back-and-forth plagued him in the dead of night, Hannibal would leave the cabin.

It had become a habit after that first night, after he fell; his thirst for freedom was quenched by the cool splashing of the Milky Way against the phantom throat of his gaze. The stars' steady voices drowned out the brine-mother's ceaseless presence, instead leaving him to lay against the solid floor. Hannibal was not sure why the ocean's movement bothered him so; he had previously attributed it to the monotonous rhythm. With his back against hardwood, though, the feeling was soothing. The floor, the exact opposite of his bed, alleviated what had been jabbing his vertebrae with bristle-thin knives; it was a curious thing, peace from what should cause only pain.

Hannibal had brought a cane the first time he fell, but managed just fine without it on his later nightwalks; Will would need it if he ever saw him leave. Hannibal could almost hear how fast the cane's click-and-step heartbeat would pound against the floor, Will hunting for his form with worry tumbling from his eyes like a rainstorm. He would scent the air to find panic- citrus-like and bitter- muffled by waves of warm-spice relief when Will would spot him lying motionless on the ground. He wondered if the relief would come from his presence, or from his stillness; would Will find nourishment at the sight, or at the death of him?

Hannibal kept his ears perked for Will's three-legged gait, noticeable just under the cosmic thrum. Much like the dilemma between his own life and death, the sound could mean happiness and care; it could also be the prophet of dread. Hannibal stayed alert on these nights, in case he was dragged back to the room that was a little too small and a little too bright- a little too much like snowy mornings with little arms wrapped around his waist, or like three years of empty palace rooms. He trusted Will not to take him back against his

wishes, but he did not trust his body to maintain its independence under Will's touch. Hannibal could barely catch himself falling into Will with a force hundreds of times that of gravity; the impact would leave a mile-long crater if he was to be brought back by force.

Luckily, the stars sang the sweet prayer of escape when conflict and pain began to radiate from his bones. Will's eternally-occupied mind was always silent then; no solace was to be found in the far-off body of his beloved on the couch. Will's energy hummed quietly during the day, but night all but silenced the sound. With Will like this, chances of being caught were slim; nevertheless, Hannibal kept his sin still. He could not control his legs yet, but his arms were strong and healing fast. They served him well, only trembling- never buckling- under the weight of his upper body. They gave him the gift of silence to open the cabin door, to pull himself from the carpet onto the dark wood deck, and to turn his body towards the sky.

He could see no barrier in sight, and wished Will could see the same. He wished their stars would align and they would never have to speak the fact aloud. The cosmos held the myths and mouths of glorious gods in tandem with the violent beauty of Cygnus; Jupiter next to Orion. The pure richness of the world was right outside the cabin door, and only Hannibal could see; Will was as good as blind.

Dolarhyde had claimed he would change him and Will in death. While the Dragon's amateurish attempts at art did not impress Hannibal, the circumstances of his and Will's survival surely amused him. They had been baptized in water, reborn to tongues of searing-hot pain, blessed with breath, and revived on a slab of earth- changed with every element, crucified and resurrected on a pagan altar. God had found a new form; so had they. Such a birth was bound to transform the newborn, in one way or another.

Some of this transformation came as a surprise, even to himself. Hannibal would not call his actions impulsivity just yet; that was not a sacrament he had been gifted through rebirth. His restlessness rarely showed when in company, but Will and the walls that encircled him drew it out like droplets of blood trickling out from the skin's surface. He would rather call it the injured wolf's urge to run, oblivious to the state of its legs. The rush of fresh air filled his chest with such fire that it turned the ocean's screams to mere vapor, filled his stomach with such precious milk that his muscles need not convert it to energy; this was the freedom he had denied for so long. Even on the loose in Florence, he was behind mind-palace bars; Hannibal would not let his broken bones keep him from freedom.

Even faced with Hannibal's pacing form, Will was kind. He and Hannibal left the room more often, whenever he asked, but there was an appeal to going alone. Hannibal pulled his autonomy out of the sea and held it close to his chest, transforming the learned pain-response to something made of appreciation. He appreciated the ocean's violence and its calm, saw himself in the foam at wave-ends. It is the part that touches the flesh first, washing the apostle's feet out of love. Servitude is one with divine suffering, both borne of love; Hannibal had suffered for that which he learned to love and had loved from the start. He would be the foam carried by the wave, propelled and compelled to wash the feet of Christ standing at the water's edge. The ocean and its waves were not purely a device for Hannibal to apply metaphor to, though; they were still a force of nature.

Hannibal was reminded of this when a flash of lighting startled him, accompanied by the crash of thunder and porcelain-shatter of waves. Most nights were calm, harbingers of restlessness; violent nights like these strummed his lyre-string vocal cords with a firm softness. Rain pelted his bedside wall and pressed shivers the size of pebbles into his neck; the only disquieting aspect of the storm was rolling thunder. Will was not here to soothe him and keep his body from jumping at each flash. A second of blinding light meant ear-splitting noise was on its way, and Hannibal could not escape; he was not confined by his beloved's arms, but by a false mother-snake's constrictive tail. Hannibal could not breathe.

His blood and breath made a mockery of the ocean, flowing and filling Hannibal's head until he could hear them thumping under his skin. His blood crashed and broke like waves, his breath hitched and rumbled like cracking thunder- his body sang uncanny the song of the sea. The rush of red water was enough to propel him towards the door, crawling along the floor using his elbows for support. Hannibal's hand met the doorknob, turned, and flew out to grasp at the wet floorboards. His clothing smacked against them, leaving fabric-kisses in its wake; the pattern was zigzagged, mimicking the path of the very serpent that tempted Eve.

Hannibal's throat felt raw. The sensation of wind and rain and light and sound was beautifully painful, too much and yet just enough to appease the beast's appetite; he felt calm. The pounding heart fell silent after a few minutes submerged in cold rainwater, caressed by the ripples brought forth by thunder's rumbling ministrations. It was almost like the eye of a hurricane, quiet in the center of the storm; this eye was not made of stillness, but of raging teeth and foam. Hannibal found his peace here where the world was ravaged by nature's pure violence, where most would find terror. He tasted relief where all but Will spat out blood.

There was a time Will kindled his flame with acts- no, sins- of omission. Fresh out of confinement, Will had once asked Hannibal to sin more honestly, waltzing around a confession with great care, but stepping into the hellfire without the plush life-raft of outright lies. Hannibal noted the likelihood of projection, here; Will would no longer lie about his desires, but would expertly conceal their truth inside the eye of his fishing-hook-needle. There were only a select few moments Hannibal believed Will had shoved his becoming past the confessional-booth grille once and for all, only to grasp for it with the clumsy yet driven fingers of an infant once more. Each time he'd stepped back from Hannibal, pushing the other back across states and seas and solitude, he flew right back towards him like a burning meteor.

Hannibal remembered the crunch of fresh-powder snow beneath his knees as police lights blinded him. He had just begun to know the snow as a harmless blanket, but remembered days and nights in the cold with silk-blond strands of hair freezing beneath his own breath. As his heart sank from the memory, he merged the spirit of both his loves. Hannibal remembered moving his eyes for relief, resting them on Will's face of resignation; his heart ached as if newly torn open from the expression. One heart had been unable to converse with the other fist-sized muscle floating about except for screaming beats and pumping blood; they could not discuss the past, even still.

"You delight, I tolerate. I don't have your appetite."

Hannibal could parse through Will's words and find truth with relative ease. This was not a sin, but a lie- omission would only prove Hannibal correct about Will's appetite. The true realization, one of beauty, was for Will to find one moonlit night on a cliff.

"I'm not going to miss you. I'm not going to find you. I'm not going to look for you. I don't want to know where you are or what you do. I don't want to think about you anymore."

Half-truths were not sins or lies; their meaning lay closer to the skin than others, visible more through a leap of faith than simple observation. Hannibal and the doubt-filled Thomas had much in common in this sense- both hungers could not be quelled with just pure faith; they had to touch, to taste and partake of Christ's flesh. Will's words were blue veins beneath pale pearl skin, iridescent and tangible only at one perfect angle. Hannibal had to weigh the true meaning of this sentence in his palms before changing the road Will's mouth was set upon; he had to make sure Will would take these words back.

"Goodbye, Hannibal."

The pilgrimage from lie to half-truth to soul-spread was something to be admired. Will had trudged along the path with grace and pious weariness, all to take root in the holy peace of his cathedral-home, Hannibal's silence a resounding wail that illuminated every votive in sight. There was something beautiful in the merging of deceit and honesty; Hannibal both feared and worshipped his inability to tell if Will spoke the truth. In this moment, he had been small- a rare feeling. He could not ask Will if he'd meant those words; even if they were true at the moment, even if he took them back in the present, they were not ripped from the seams of the fabric of time. No matter the underlying meaning and motive, the words were immovable as the sky in Atlas's grip.

It was a fact that Will came back for Hannibal. Nevertheless, the residual pain dripped from his neck and ran down his body, staining the floorboards black. This had occurred before as a verse far older, almost ancient- the exchange of forgiveness.

This rain smelled of Hannibal's forgiveness, while the cabin was soaked in Will's. Each memory had a different source, of course; Hannibal's forgiveness was created in the aftermath of a bloodbath, the rain washing him clean of all sorrow. Will's forgiveness, on the other hand, bloomed under layers of sacred rock and tomb in the musty darkness of catacombs. Both forgave, both with the same words, and with the same intent- to be forgiven in return. Will had betrayed Hannibal, denied him his freedom, but had fallen back into his arms to find him. Will voluntarily placed himself in the eye of the storm- an eye with tiny bleeding vessels that rang out like drums when they popped, deceiving all who thought the center was anything but violent. Will found his peace in what was nothing but pain to all except him and Hannibal.

This was the rare gift they shared. Will had accepted it just mere weeks ago; Hannibal had held it close to his chest for years. His only source of respite was the rabid dog's snapping jaws, God's just wrath that tore down power lines and trees alike, which Will would know by name when Hannibal bit down on his outstretched hand.

Hannibal had spent a few minutes in the eye, but his time there came to an end just as abruptly. Whatever peace he had found in searching old words and memories was lost when

the rain ended its warm swan song, falling hard and cold. The higher functions that accompanied Hannibal's memories disappeared with the rain, much as they had in that mausoleum of a kitchen; unfiltered instinct seeped through the veil. He fought back the same tears that fell as he marked Will and brought him bleeding to his knees, the same tears that came in waves as he held the man whimpering close to his heart. Puffs of hot breath merged with cold snarls and soft touches, culminating in an act of abandonment and forgiveness that could rival even the most ancient of tragic epics.

The humble raindrop was the catalyst for the cascade of teary thoughts that searched for purchase in Hannibal's mind. Will was right- his streets were not cleansed by the Great Flood, but torn apart with nature's merciless drive forward. No act of God could compare to the fragile human heart, the muscle that bloats and rots in still water.

As Hannibal lay on the ground, rain falling sharp and cold onto his face, he found he could not distinguish between his own tears and the droplets. He could return to the cabin now- see Will unaware of the anguish Hannibal had released into the storm. He could stay out here and wait for a sliver of dawn to appear- return to watch as Will stirred with the first light of morning. The soaked bedsheets could be accounted for by night terrors; Will had told Hannibal of the days he spent calling out his name, sometimes Mischa's, waking with trembling heart and burning lungs from the night's unfortunate visions. He did not have these as often anymore, allowing Will to sleep unbroken.

While Will's sleepless nights had passed, Hannibal's only increased in frequency. His fragility reached that of a Prince Rupert's drop; one well-placed strike would render his mind irreparable.

Tonight's storm bore the face of such a strike.

Hannibal let the rain fall down his face, rolling from his eyes and collecting in the shell of his ears, flowing, burying into his hair and weighing him down. He did not dare breathe when he heard a rhythm in hurried 3/4 time reach his body. He did not dare move when the rhythm turned to 4/4 as knees knocked against the floorboards. He did not dare shift his eyes from the sky as a familiar figure clawed at his pupils and throat, cupping them in its palms.

He did dare, however, to blink away the water that condensed at the ends of his eyelashes. What fell was a trinity of bodies- tears from Hannibal himself, from Will, and from the sky. Their mourning was solemn and devoid of voices, the only prayers being the sobs that wracked Hannibal's body, passing like electricity from one man to the other.

In this deafening silence, so loud it could damage one's ears till death, the two mourners found peace in what should only cause pain.

~

Will was never sure if Hannibal was fully conscious whenever he abandoned the bed, pain staining his heavy, wheezing breaths. He first awoke to the sound of Hannibal's cane rattling against the ground, succeeded by a loud thud out on the deck. Even though he jumped at the sound, Will fought all instinct to run outside; he sat still, waiting with bated breath.

Sat in a chair at the desk, he could not see if Hannibal's bed was empty; he only turned to look once no more noise escaped from the crack in the cabin door. Hannibal tended to be a restless sleeper, never staying still for long- much unlike his waking self, which held a tight leash on any and all movement. A lack of shuffling bedsheets confirmed it; Hannibal was outside. Will did not stir, and waited until the shuffling returned before falling into the half-asleep state of being he frequented.

The morning after, and for weeks to come, the cane was left at Will's side. He did not bother to bring up Hannibal's nightly journeys outside; there was no apparent harm to either, and beneficial to both. Hannibal grew more accepting of his touch, allowing Will to carry his weight on their short walks out onto the deck. Will delighted in this recent development; Hannibal leaned into the warm cradle his hands provided, so near to what had transpired the day he first spoke to Will. He craved what they shared on that day- Will found himself bringing the memories to surface on sleepless nights, feeling the shape of their shared warmth with the trembling fingertips of his mind. He found Hannibal's vulnerability crawled out from the shadows in similar circumstances- albeit not in the quiet safety of night- but when the man let his mask slip. Hannibal was determined to keep shifting his act from painful detachment to overwhelming softness without warning, eerily reminiscent of Will's own confliction when it came to Hannibal's first words after their fall. In the moments shadows lay themselves bare at Will's feet, Hannibal grew pliable beneath his hands. Lips parted in breathy sighs of contentment, muscles loosened and heads tucked themselves into the warmth of Will's skin; these were the days of peace that he painted onto the ceilings of his heart's chambers.

Even with the steady joy that came of these increasing interactions, the pair shared what Will could only name "hollowness." Hannibal's usually mobile hands, speaking and singing their words like a fluttering songbird, fell silent on these days. He received nothing except the permission to touch Hannibal; even then, the man kept tense whenever Will tried to coax the trembling creature out from inside its burrow. These were the days that led to nights of longing, the days that engraved themselves into the pillars holding up now-painted heart-ceilings- enough chipped away, and it would crumble and kill all the faithful.

Will was able to leave, sometimes, on the nights he could garner enough energy to cease the dance of sleep-wake-sleep that seized his body. He would look at the stars for a few minutes, watch as Atlas turned the great globe in his hands and pulled at the skin of his load-bearing back. He wished Hannibal could see how Orion graced the horizon, holding Jupiter in its orbit as the Swan holds Leda in rapture. He hoped their stars aligned enough to form a constellation they could both understand, creating its own mythos and cementing it into the sky as surely as God on the Fourth Day of creation.

Tonight, not a single one dotted the cloudy gray sky. Instead, each lighthouse of faith was obscured by wind and rain, illuminated if only briefly by the terrible wail of thunder and lightning. It had been but a drizzle before he'd brought Hannibal to bed earlier that night- a complicated process on the days Hannibal refused any warmth on Will's end. The man had been cold all day, unyielding under lips that brushed his neck and water that warmed his gooseflesh skin.

Now, stirred by a sudden flash and lifted by a deafening crash, Will stood at Hannibal's side. He was in bed, still asleep, head rolling from side to side with notable discomfort. He pressed a hand to the sleeping other's cheek, watching the gentle hills of his pupils run rampant beneath the skin-cover of Hannibal's eyelids. Will did not worry, did not note the overwhelming bitterness of fear that surrounded him like an aura; he admired Hannibal. He leaned into Will's touch in sleep and calmed at his scent, aware or otherwise. There was no hesitation here, no restraint, only the need to quell his fear by any means possible.

Will returned to his chair, arranging his legs to hang over the armrest- it was not a very comfortable sleeping arrangement, otherwise. He left Hannibal to his devices, or more accurately, to writhe in a pool of distress until dawn broke. Will could not do much more except touch him- something he wanted to refrain from for the time being. Too much affection, and Hannibal would lose the shred of independence he had been cultivating these past few weeks. Will would give anything to lift up the bedsheets and settle into the space beside Hannibal, to wrap his arms around the man's waist, to press his nose to the back of his neck and breathe in the scent of fear, watch as it turned sweet with sleep.

Without any intervention, though, Hannibal's episodes resolved by daylight. A stab of guilt would feed Will to fullness in the morning; Hannibal would accept the doting gestures and pleas to soothe until the upcoming night. Will presumed the night terrors drank all the resolve from Hannibal's body, a parasite that ate at his cocoon to reveal a brilliant creature bearing the death's-head on its back. This creature was fragile as a hummingbird, with the will and strength of one, too- and a lifespan just as short.

Will allowed himself the peace of mind to be lulled to sleep by the symphony of the boat's predictable rocking, Hannibal's heavy panting, and the thunder's easy rumble.

What awoke him soon after was not dawn light nor storm-sounds just outside the door, but the nearly imperceptible evaporation of a water droplet against his cheek. Eyes still shut, Will lifted an arm to wipe it away, but was met with a series of droplets ornamenting the back of his hand like disappearing jewels, aware of the mortality gravity had bestowed upon them. The coolness woke him for good, now, and drew his eyes to the cabin door wide-open, letting the storm's bloodthirsty spittle into the room.

Hannibal was outside. This was no surprise to Will, considering this had become a habit- but the raging storm was more than enough a reason to investigate. Will felt his skin turn hot, the tip of his nose growing warm and numb, his lungs burning- and yet allowing an impressive rush of air into his body. Adrenaline; the ordeal had just become less investigation than mad hunt. Will's hand found the cane, naturally, fearfully, without thought, and he ran.

The rain was no longer an obstacle; it blurred before Will's eyes, becoming only a mirage he passed through. Little droplets held no weight next to the colossal god he was searching for; Will felt himself a lost lamb amongst the flock, searching for its divine shepherd. There were times he felt like a god, other times a lamb, only but a vessel for something greater. This lamb could be a sacrifice, or maybe the very Lamb of God, Agnus Dei; its life would be spent pouring its wrath out upon whatever had done its love any harm. The Lamb would carry its need to find and keep what the universe had given it in its golden cup, and the Lamb's beloved would eat and drink of this vessel. Prophets had spoken of this consumption: When

the flesh was eaten, the blood drunk, then the Lamb would dwell in the Beloved, and the Beloved in the Lamb.

Whatever words had been uttered centuries ago as scripture, Will only let them take residence as a passing thought. If he truly was the Lamb, he would have been slaughtered already. He would not allow the curse to pass to Hannibal, either- to become a lamb sacrificed by nature's apathetic divinity. He would stand between Hannibal and the gods of old, protecting as a lightning rod. He would draw the rain into his own blood, if only to keep Hannibal from being soaked to the bone. He would jump overboard, risk drowning if just to keep Hannibal's beating heart from stilling.

Will grasped the railing, trembling as he scanned the deck. It was unusually dark for a storm- some sliver of starlight would normally bounce through the clouds. He closed his eyes, listened.

The world was clearer like this. Will could hear the rain pattering against the deck, echoes slightly different against a plastic tarp versus solid wood. Stranger still was a sound more muffled, with small gusts of air surrounding the source- tears.

Will flew towards the sound, cane tapping furiously against wood planks. He reached a figure laying on the center of the deck, obscured by rain and inky black from afar- Hannibal. Little tremors shook his chest pushing out something so foreign Will could barely place it.

Hannibal was sobbing- full-body, devastating tears that spilled over like water past the brim of a crowded baptismal font. Will let the cane go, knees hitting the ground by Hannibal's head. He took in the sight of Hannibal in agony as God watched Christ in Gethsemane.

The man's face was flushed in inkblot patches, so different from the euphoria of a hunt. Melancholia presented itself organically on Hannibal's face; Will had time to appreciate the sight as pure art. Hannibal's eyes were swelled, obscuring almost any shine from his dark eyes. The space between his nose and lips was slick, not just from rain, light bouncing from it as from velvet. Will considered leaving him to bathe in his own misery again- it would resolve by morning- but went to hold the fallen angel himself well and tight. He slipped one hand behind Hannibal's head, the other over his chest, and pressed- a reassuring weight to alert Hannibal to his presence; Will was not sure how sharp the man's senses were in this state of mind.

In sleep, Hannibal allowed his weight to settle on Will. He was conscious, here; he lay still and stiff in Will's arms, the only indication of life being his uncontrollably shaking body and darting eyes. Hannibal was vulnerable here, but disparate in comparison to what they had shared before. Those moments of peace held warmth close; this moment was defined by the cold rain and hot tears that fell from both men. Water- not fire- shook loose its shackles and poured out with no mercy.

These next minutes were filled with nothing but the act of simple holding. Hannibal, while aware of Will, let tears fall until his blood ran dry. Even in this cold, Hannibal could not keep his body from responding to the emotions flooding his blood. Will felt his muscles relax and twist with each shaky breath, each of which evened out after a moment. He ran a thumb

across the man's cheek, searching for any warm water amongst the frigid rain that fell upon their bodies; Hannibal blinked from the intrusion.

"Hello, Will."

"Hannibal." He shifted his hand from the man's chest to under his knees, draping Hannibal across his lap. Whether his voice was rough from crying or from disuse, Will could not tell. He pressed his nose up to the wet hair, taking in the faint scent and allowing his own ragged breaths to break free.

One of Hannibal's hands was pressed to Will's chest, while the other lie tucked between his arm and side. Will felt the rush of air leave Hannibal's throat as he spoke, barely a whisper, "I feel as though I have been gutted."

"Serves you right."

Will watched as the possible underlying meaning of his words tumbled through Hannibal's brain. Would he take it lightheartedly, or let the weight of the statement seep into his bones?

The latter rang true. Hannibal's previous veils evaporated in an instant, replaced by teeth tearing into his chest, drawing blood, "Do you think I deserve pain, Will?"

There was something about the way Hannibal spoke in whispers; the sound blended with the rain seamlessly, as if the words were meant to be spoken here, now. "You deserve the world. You deserve it in all of its beauty and hurt and unkindness; you don't get to escape the pain."

"You could say light is nothing without shadow to support it; pain is what gives love its value. That much I understand," Hannibal turned his head away from Will's chest, glancing at the sea. "What eludes me is why you continue to hurt me."

Will blinked, silenced for a few seconds by astonishment. He took in a breath to push into Hannibal's sea of words, sending out a raft in the shape of a question, "How do I hurt you?"

"You leave me with no choice but to reciprocate all that you do. You love me with your hands and with your service, and leave me indebted."

Some of it was intentional, Will had to admit. But much of his care for Hannibal came from necessity, from the need to heal and recover from injuries. The common man could call their interactions something borne of pure brotherly camaraderie, akin to the Greek storge; Will could not lie so to himself. If anything, the universal divine love of agape was a better fit. He took care of Hannibal, not because of his helplessness or services to gain from his healed form, but because of his very existence- because he wanted to see Hannibal. All of this Will could only admit through a statement of reassurance; he would show Hannibal the vastness of his love in time. With a puff of firm breath, Will transformed his cacophony of thought into a single lyric of speech, "You don't owe me anything."

"I wish to believe that, Will," Hannibal let out a low sigh. "What of the times you returned to my side after leaving me alone in my palace? I would suspect an ulterior motive."

"That was my own choice." Will tested the air, proposing, "If I were to have some ulterior motive, it's safe to assume you would, too. Why else would you turn yourself in?"

"Why does the dog refrain from savaging the sheep, if not to keep food and shelter?"

"Not just food and shelter, but for family. For care."

"You say I search for family?"

Will shook his head, letting a water-heavy strand fall from his head onto Hannibal's face; he brushed it away. "You've already found that," a furrow of the brow, a tongue passing over pursed lips, "No, you search to keep it. The one way to keep me close was to make sure you could never leave my sight."

"Voluntary confinement- though I could not predict if you would return. I survived in solitude on hope."

"That hurt, didn't it?" Sharp and unforgiving, barely a question, but- Will needed to hear the words fall from those lips that knew blood as the hummingbird knows nectar.

The spark that had danced on Hannibal's face just moments before fizzled away, bringing him back to when Will had found him on the ground. Another arrow broke Hannibal's skin.

"What you're doing now is almost exactly the same. I'm obligated to keep you content and safe from harm as long as you're injured; that would make me indebted to you," Will stopped as he found Hannibal's throat crying mercy. He knew- they both knew- of their mutual entrapment.

Hannibal blinked to disperse the tears pooling under his lashes, angling his head to let them fall, "I see."

Will watched this pitiful display before submitting to the feeling of his own throat tightening. He let a tear fall, two, three, before softening the blow of his former words, heart heavy on his tongue. "I was hoping you weren't being like this," Will's eyes fell on Hannibal's legs, still limp and soaked from rain, "on purpose."

"As was I."

Some admission was necessary. Will steeled himself for it, dropping to his knees against the metaphysical prie-dieu, "I need you, Hannibal. But not for a favor or to find myself; I know myself with you, regardless of your actions."

"I need not be here for you to understand yourself anymore. We have blurred enough for your nightmare to come true."

"Not a nightmare," Will corrected, "a dream." He laced his fingers into Hannibal's damp hair, carding them through the dark gray strands, breathing, "I need you, but I don't need anything from you. Can you say the same about yourself?"

"Yes." The word was rushed, the warning snap of jaws before the bite.

"I want to hear you say it."

Hannibal hesitated. "I can't see the truth in your words. I was hoping you weren't doing this," he tilted his head towards Will's arms wrapped around his body, "on purpose."

Mimicry; Will's heart swelled as he felt the other's pain show its teeth. He let warmth, syrupy-sweet, fill his voice, "Hannibal. I know you." Will would have to sing with honey-soaked arrows as the songbird cries softly aloud the truth, "You look up at the night sky and wish our stars were the same. I'm telling you they are."

Realization dawned on Hannibal's face; the last arrow had hit. "Both of us will continue to hurt as long as one of us thinks they are indebted to the other."

Will smiled in assurance, "See. You're not impaired in sight, only speech."

Hannibal visibly bristled, upper lip curling with distaste followed by amusement at the snide remark, "That is awfully rude."

"Eat me, then," he pulled Hannibal close, holding him tighter by the second, "Let me be with you always, let me inhabit any one form of yours."

"Only do not leave me in the abyss, where I cannot find you," Hannibal raised his head and sniffled, less harsh than before, "I am no beholden ghost, and you no meal of mine."

Will smirked, "No desire to eat me up?"

"No, not in the literal sense."

"Then in what sense?" Will tilted his head in question, lines beside his eyes twitching with each blink.

"Metaphysical. Consumption with such surgical precision that it is almost anatomical, only the cadaver is provided by God- not by my own hand."

He was a God-given gift, to Hannibal. Will dared place himself in the role of the gift-giver, suggesting with a newfound weightlessness, "Little do you know, I could be the Great Provider himself."

He shivered as Hannibal's gaze intensified with hope, meeting his own. This spurred Hannibal on to prompt, "Would you give yourself over to me, Will? Would you let me consume the sacrament of your flesh and blood?"

"As long as you let me do the same."

Hannibal nodded this time, tongue stilling for a precious few seconds. His fists grabbed at Will's rain-soaked shirt, fabric bunching in his palms. He started quietly under his breath, almost indiscernible to any man but Will, "Was it literal as well, when you said you weren't going to miss me?"

Will weighed his words carefully. He could settle into a stream of comfort, lulling Hannibal into soft security. He could just as well twist the arrowhead further into his chest; the stream of blood it would usher forward seemed more satisfying. Will spoke in a whisper, veiled by a kind voice, "More than you could know."

Hannibal tensed; Will had just stoked his fears as a poker resuscitates dying embers of a fire. "You reinforce my doubts."

Will let the storm rumble on, filling the world with ambient noise before he continued; he was interrupted by Hannibal's sudden intake of breath.

"I would like to believe you will stay."

Will relaxed, forcibly pulling Hannibal deeper into his skin, "I have nowhere else to go."

"I don't wish to see you trapped. If you desire to have me, then do so honestly." Hannibal shook, eyes closing as his lips opened to release a shaky breath.

Will dug his arms into the flesh under his hands, letting it give beneath the pressure. He did not squeeze; he only wrapped himself around the broken man gently enough to make him wince. Will let his hand gain momentum, moving through Hannibal's hair with a soft, predictable rhythm. "That's not a hidden motive, Hannibal. This is just a need. Nothing more than simple human instinct."

Rain fell around them like stiff-thirsty tongues touching water, tapping Will's head relentlessly and digging into his curls to avoid Hannibal's tear-stained face. The pair resembled the Pieta, though only on the surface; instead of the Virgin Mother mourning her Beloved Son, two gods of the same body shared a moment of painful yet joyous understanding. Hannibal, cradled in Will's arms, drew out the conversation to hear Will's words as the infant moves its lips for sustenance, "You say I shouldn't deny my instincts."

Will grinned at the shallow similarity between his own becoming and Hannibal's descent into vulnerability. He loved the irony in this, loved how Hannibal lay his sword down at his feet; this was devotion. "Embrace them. Believe me," he took the man's trembling hand- the only marked sign of fear, "and let me know you."

Hannibal's taut string of trust gave, head dropping to Will's chest and residual tears spotting whatever dry area the rain had spared. His voice cracked, unwrapping twine from the wings of a dove-thought, "I will do and ask nothing in return, then."

They sighed in unison, Hannibal parting with the distress of the storm, and Will watching the sun bust through cloud-barriers. A final sound fled whimpering from Will's teeth, latching itself onto Hannibal's relief with gentle hands as he hummed, "Good."

my most used words in this fic so far (besides Hannibal and Will) are eyes, water, god and hands. seems fitting

North

Chapter Summary

The empire of blood rose and fell in a matter of seconds, rabidity erupting only to be repressed by sleep.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The sea was quiet. It rocked the boat gently, back and forth, without a storm's violence; the worst of it had passed. Hannibal could smell the raindrops spilling off the boat's flat planes as it tilted, pattering onto the ground and returning to the sea. The sensation was not enough to wake him fully; his other senses managed the task on their own.

Sound, sight and smell were not of much use, though bells rang with the stimulation of touch. Warmth spread across Hannibal's back- heavy, constant- and ran up to his neck where slow breaths made their nest among thin branches of hair. He could not feel arms wrapped around him, but the light pressure of curled fists against his back suggested hands- Will.

The haze of sleep dissolved in an instant as Hannibal stiffened, breath hitching; he did not remember getting back into bed after the storm, let alone with Will. He sifted through the drawers of his mind, searching; was he bathed? Did Will carry him to bed? Had his own mouth betrayed him?

Gaps in his memory, while expected with tiredness and prolonged emotional distress, unnerved Hannibal. He couldn't pry open his tome of words and images, couldn't grasp them with his hands and know what had happened as he slept. He rarely allowed his body to rest in earnest, as a result, making any period of true unconsciousness an anomaly. He'd faced a similar awakening when first recovering from his injuries. Will had been there, awake, to guide and inform him of all that had passed. This late morning, Hannibal had been the first to break the eggshell and find the world anew; Will was asleep.

The creeping sense of dread that had arisen from his lapse in memory receded, leaving only the physical reality for Hannibal to take in: he was in bed with Will curled up to him. He took a deep breath in to scent the air, noting how the soft fabric-scent mixed with Will's own, birthing a warm and earthen son. Hannibal could not sense his own fear- a curiosity, considering he knew the scent well. The room was devoid of fear's bitterness, free from frozen winter nights and ribs jutting out from under milky skin. Everything in the space vibrated with pain's identically-different kin by the name of comfort. It spilled from Will as wine from a tilted chalice, feeding and intoxicating the land beneath.

Hannibal allowed the initial rush of rare worry to pass, instead bringing his attention to the full sensation of Will pressed up against him. It was similar to being held by him before and after a bath, or to catching his potent tiredness while settling in for bed- although here, Will was calm; even when Hannibal left the room at night, Will slept awake, mind only slowing enough to allow his body the necessary respite. Hannibal had only ceased doing the same after he'd been injured, on the nights he managed to wrestle his way to peace. He let Will stay this way, curled up and breathing soft and sweet.

Will was at peace, for the first time in years, because of him; Hannibal allowed his heart to flutter with pride at the thought. With its ego stroked, the heart slowed to fall into the arms that held it safe. Hannibal bore witness to how his own body relaxed, how blood filled his face with pleasant heat, how the hairs at the back of his neck stood on end as Will's breath passed over them- all of this happening in the span of a second.

The idea of being fundamentally changed by Will was yet another source of dreaded discomfort. It was not enough to make his heart race- not in Will's presence- but the very fact gnawed at him with no sign of its jaws unclenching. Its edges dug into his skin, yet another set of teeth tearing into his flesh, uprooting the veins and capillaries nourishing the frail hearts beating beneath. Hannibal had thought he would adore being so close to Will, as he had after slaying the Red Dragon, but found himself, most simply explained, terrified.

Fear had driven the primordial man to eat. It had driven the world to start wars, to kill, to love; if love and death were the great hinges on which all human sympathies turned, then fear was the great door which let them through. Fear drove Hannibal to tear himself away from Will, moving to press his nose against the cool, thin wall that lined the bed. He felt Will shuffle around a bit, heard him let out a low whine, searching, and listened as silence placed its familiar body into the space between their respective selves.

~

Quite predictably, at least according to Will, Hannibal softened under a gentle hand. When the oh-so-human emotion of worry rotted beneath Hannibal's skin, its poison ate away at his walls, leaving behind a frayed nerve for Will to mend. The sun's ascension past the horizon pulled Hannibal up into Will's arms and back through the cabin door, laying him to rest. Will let Hannibal breathe in silence, recovering from the exertion of emotion and talking in the bone-chilling rain. He replaced what remained of the earthwater with a damp cloth, soaked in soap and softness, passing it over any patch of rough, sweat-stained skin. The occasional thumb brushed against Hannibal's cheek, drawing out wisps of breath, drawing in the man sat beside the aching body. Will marveled at Hannibal's quiet beauty; it rarely presented itself with such humble grace.

He only noticed his own prolonged stillness after receiving a prompting noise from Hannibal, whose lips parted to give what Will could only call an animal plea for companionship.

"Stay."

Hannibal moved, limbs heavy, to one side of the bed, leaving enough space for Will to crawl in beneath the sheets. He watched Hannibal's eyes, slightly out of focus- a pity, this; the man

would likely not remember his words in full. He noted how Hannibal shifted towards the wall that offered protection on one side; one should never sleep with their back to the door, better yet with a wall to shelter them. Will recognized it in himself- sleeping on the first floor of his house to be aware of all life traveling inside and out. Will offered Hannibal another wall, made of his body, enclosing Hannibal in the bed.

The stiff mattress bent beneath his weight, creating a gentle hill down which Hannibal's body rolled- with aid, as to keep him from further injury- and settled beside Will's own. He considered draping his hands across Hannibal, but held back. It wouldn't be wise to bruise his skin more than necessary; this was at least a reasonable excuse. Will folded in on himself, tucking his hands into the nest between his belly and Hannibal's back, the upper of which lay flush against his chest. Hannibal's spine nudged at his knuckles as they breathed, Will's own body swelling with air and colliding with the clean, dew-wet skin of the other.

Manually, now, Will forced oxygen to and from his lungs, sending it through Hannibal's hair and across his neck. He wondered how Hannibal would perceive this moment; would he smell it, first? Or would touch give him away? He understood how Hannibal could become enamored with his mind, wind it up and watch the cosmic egg break, stare in wonderment as the myth of creation unfolded; he wanted to know what Hannibal would do.

Will placed a kiss to the back of the now-sleeping man's neck, composed more of tongue than of lips, and took in the faint scent as the spot evaporated. It was the smell of pure skin, condensed to the size of his mouth; Will would trap and keep its essence in a bottle, if he could. The touch brought forth a shiver, Hannibal's skin prickling; Will felt the downy hair stand to attention and drop after only seconds, though with more fervor than the thick, silvered strands covering his chest and limbs. He wavered a bit, weighing the possibility of the reaction being purely physiological, or if Hannibal's buried desire was being flushed from its burrow with sleep's flooding honesty.

With newfound haste, Will took his tongue to the exposed skin of Hannibal's arm, fixing the dark hairs into place along his mouth's path. They stole the water from his lips like a sea of starving arms reaching for food, salvation, for anything they could get. Again, Hannibal trembled.

With intent, Will blew a quick breath over the drying skin to free it from water's weight. While the spittle in question evaporated, the hair stayed in its flattened position. Will sat back and admired it, as one would marvel at the ribs holding up a cathedral ceiling; gravity would help keep the rest aloft, but seemed to deny the laws of physics, if only for a few hundred years.

He rubbed Hannibal's arm as the man shifted to give a semblance of comfort, or for selfish reasons, even- to imprint the skin-to-skin contact into his hand's memory. At this, Hannibal did not shiver. Considering his exploration- or rather, experiment- involving the body before him, Will concluded that the reactions were, in fact, borne solely by Hannibal's nervous system.

He did not often have the chance to poke and prod at the man in such close proximity; Will felt himself a doctor of sorts, or, more accurately, a surgeon with the patient unawares. He bore on his sleeve the curiosity that comes with closeness- the urge to touch and taste and feel

all that the other has to offer, in sensuality moreso than bodily lust. It is the cross every sinful priest bears on his back- the conviction that their longing is spiritual, and not corporeal.

Will's burden was only made heavier upon his shoulders as Hannibal shifted in sleep, the curve of his backside pressing up against Will and drawing out a strangled gasp. The gentle pressure was almost undetectable, a trickle of blood amidst a sea, but was enough to throw Will's body into heated fever. He kept still, praying his hips would lose the ghost of rhythmic force they'd found, and worked to align his breaths with Hannibal's, whose were growing calm and slow. He lost the rhythm of instinctual hunger, replacing it with the soft beat of thoughtless breath. The empire of blood rose and fell in a matter of seconds, rabidity erupting only to be repressed by sleep.

Will opened his eyes to the revelation that he had closed them, and had in turn parted with his dear warmth. Hannibal was far from him now, facing the wall. His consciousness seemed only to be dipping its toes into rest's dark waters, barely asleep; from the looks of it, Will had just missed him.

Yet another curiosity offered itself up to the toothed gears of Will's mind, all to be torn apart under their metallic scrutiny. Hannibal had moved away from him, from this intimacy he had initiated all on his own; it was becoming a habit. Hannibal reached out with trembling fingers for whatever closeness he could get; when it was placed into his arms, he shied away from it and sought out his own solitude. He responded to Will's offerings of intimacy with an eagerness that traveled up and down Will's spine like pure ichor, flooding his veins with golden heat.

Hannibal rarely kept himself distant from anything; there was something pitiful in his obvious avoidance, this fear of reveling in affection of his own creation that the both of them could share. Will could see it now; even in the kitchen, Hannibal held them both in the palm of his hand. Even in Florence, Hannibal could not bring himself to consume Will, mind and body. What Hannibal could not control, he feared.

But the world is not shaded in simple black and white. The Trinity's first head was made of fear, and the second of reverence. Will remembered the moments Hannibal was visibly overtaken by the soaring heart- when he left their fate to divine intervention on the cliff, when he placed a gun to Hannibal's temple and watched his head turn in acceptance. In these moments, Hannibal was at Will's mercy, though not from choice. Whatever fear there was in losing that control, reverence overpowered. It could be that such deep love and admiration was what brought forth fear, to Hannibal; still, the last head remained.

The Father is to fear and the Son is to reverence as the Holy Spirit is to all-encompassing presence. What brought Hannibal to his knees was not solely his own lack of control, or Will's taking of it, but the fact that they could do so when in equal power. Their acts as two predators together meant more than when one was prey. Any shifts in power held more weight when they were of equal standing; to give in with one's free will intact is an act of true sacrifice- truer than involuntary captivity or forced devotion.

He would allow Hannibal to seek what he desired on his own, without encouragement. Will couldn't bear to cease bestowing his affection upon the man- that wouldn't end- but he

wouldn't guide Hannibal. To be a loyal worshipper requires not to be hand-fed faith, but to find it with one's own hands.

Will sat up and steadied himself with a hand on the mattress. This way, Hannibal would have time to regain some independence and decide for himself the intimacy he wanted to seek. As with any frightened animal, one should let them approach you of their own volition, even while providing it with food and care.

He leaned over Hannibal, who seemed about to wake; the raised curves of his irises flicked rapidly under their lids, creating and destroying glass-fragile dreams spanning eons- mere seconds, in reality. Will placed a hand on Hannibal's head and gave a light scratch- enough to break said dreams- and rolled to leave the bed just as the man twitched with waking.

Will did not pause to greet him, instead making his way to the bathroom for a robe before staking claim to the wood-paneled kitchenette for breakfast. It was midday already, but Hannibal preferred Will's cooking to anything ready-made; though Will knew it couldn't compare to Hannibal's own. Regardless, Will toasted enough bread for two, paired with homemade conserve. The warmth in Hannibal's eyes at the sight of simple bread and jam was worth the temporary inferiority. As he spread the conserve, smooth and easy with a dull butterknife, Will regarded a shuffling noise just a few doors away, coming from the bed-cabin. It was dotted with thumps and weight dragging across the floor; Will put breakfast on hold. He'd set aside enough time to come running in case Hannibal decided to claim his independence faster than was physically possible, ready for the worst.

The shuffling ceased- a silence asking Will to come to the room. He expected Hannibal to need some help getting dressed properly, at the very least, possibly an arm for sitting up in bed without wincing. Will covered the toast with a plate turned upside-down, keeping it warm; he wasn't sure if Hannibal would be needing attention for more than just clothing. With more urgency than usual, Will entered the bedroom, finding a scene much more uplifting than expected; Hannibal had managed to get fully dressed, sans socks and pants up to his knees.

Wordlessly, Will took the socks strewn haphazardly on the floor and knelt at Hannibal's feet to slip them on. He insisted on wearing different outfits on the daily, even with the time and effort it took Will do to the laundry by hand. It could be that Hannibal was unaware of the process; he wouldn't admit it, Will knew, even under questioning. However, Will found it endearing; Hannibal's resolve remained undiluted by his body's limits.

Will grabbed the pant hips and pulled them up Hannibal's legs, to his thighs. Hannibal turned to lay himself flat, giving Will room to move them up to his waist. The process went smoothly; they'd learned and improved over time.

He let his hands hover over Hannibal's waist, trailing them over his thighs before perching at the bed's edge. Will looked back to a silent "*thank you*," on Hannibal's part.

"You're getting better at this," Will said, eyes wandering to a wood knot in the ceiling. He forced himself to tear them away, found Hannibal waiting to respond.

"Does the prospect scare you?" Hannibal sat unreadable, only giving away his curiosity with a slight raise of his head.

"Does it scare me?" Will considered the question, echoing it back before shaking his head, "No. It- it unnerves me."

"*You enjoy leaving me with nothing except you.*"

"I'm not *leaving* you with it," Will enunciated, putting planned emphasis on the words, "I'm *giving* it- myself- to you."

A smile crept up Hannibal's face, sharp and rare, "*Shall I point out the horned angel that fell from my shoulder to yours?*"

Will scoffed, "All you did was give my angel horns; I pushed it off the ledge."

"*How could I forget?*"

"You couldn't."

Hannibal's eyes blazed with dark fire, illuminated by light spilling in through the tiny window above the sitting-desk. The reaction sent blood-heat through Will's veins, burning up his skin; he loved Hannibal's expression in this moment. It was curious and hungry and alive, like the rabbit's fear-filled breaths circling through the fox's racing-river bloodstream.

Enraptured for a moment, Will's lips opened and closed in silent strain before confessing, songbird-sweet, "I don't have to carry you," he inhaled, passed a tongue over his lips, "but I want to; you know that as well as I do."

"*You hunger to watch me breathe, unaltered and uninhibited. You want to use your limited time with me in this vulnerable state wisely. As I would do the same, I see no issue here.*"

"I could assume that," Will said with an exhale as he stood, waiting for Hannibal to move. He wanted to carry him to the bathroom to get ready, but kept his grasping hands at his sides, opening and closing in wait. He knew those words to be true, but could feel the loose string pulled taut whenever he moved too hastily. Hannibal looked up at him, blinked, and understood, taking Will's arm and placing it around his back. Will completed the position, hoisting the man up into the air and heading to the bathroom. Maybe it was no longer necessary, Hannibal being carried, but it was too great a risk otherwise- in terms of both Hannibal's safety and Will's comfort.

"I made breakfast. Jam and toast." He felt his voice rumble through Hannibal's body, echoing through his chest and back towards himself.

Hannibal untucked his hands from beside Will's ribs, tilting his head in question, "*And tea?*"

"And tea." He would have to put the kettle on soon, to bring it out with the rest of breakfast, but it wouldn't take long. Hannibal was capable of all personal hygiene besides bathing, now, and could be left alone for a while. Will brought him to the bathroom and placed him on the toilet seat, which functioned much like a chair in the cramped room, reaching up to the sink.

Will gave a curt, "Knock if you need me," before receiving a nod and returning to the kitchen.

Considering their dead-of-night escapade, Will was relieved with how quickly they fell back into routine. He listened for the too-loud toilet flush, thankful Hannibal kept the door closed. Then the sink turning on, off, on again, the quiet hum of an electric shaver- as predictable and ritualistic as a weekly mass. They'd be reaching their new safe house, soon; Will was dreading it. What he'd learned to know would fall apart, Hannibal's needs included; it pained him to think of a world in which Hannibal would only need him in theory, and not in truth.

Will was in the process of arranging the silverware proper when he was interrupted by a fist rapping on the bathroom door. Upon opening it, he found Hannibal looking up at him expectantly, eyes bright. Fighting back a warm smile, he took Hannibal up into his arms and carried him out the bathroom door.

They didn't get far before Will was fighting back the bitter tug in his chest to speak, "Think you can walk to breakfast?"

"It would be beneficial for me to start walking on my own." Hannibal rubbed his thumb over his index finger, as if considering his next words in earnest, *"Though I presume the cane is no longer in favor?"*

"It'll be mine for emergencies."

Hannibal's face betrayed something akin to a smirk. Will emulated the expression in returned understanding; emergencies may be more common than expected. The moment passed between them as strong and fleeting as lightning, leaving space for thunder to make its home.

A thought made itself known in the arena of Will's skull, freeing itself through his lips with unusual timidity, "You can hold onto me, if you'd like?"

There was no obvious emotion from Hannibal as Will set his feet down, catching the man before he toppled over, towers, spires and all.

Hannibal spoke with a sigh, gently defeated without sword nor shield, *"It seems I have no choice."*

"Just until you can walk independently," Will assured as Hannibal took a step forward, back and arms supported by the other's firm hand.

"Until then."

~

Will swore he could hear the boat's hull scraping against the rocky shoreline; he thought of Hannibal being subjected to the terrible sound. He'd be back soon enough, he'd assured Hannibal, but the bouldered terrain was difficult to traverse, even for Will.

The pale gravel path winding up towards the house was easier to scale. From here, Will could see the delicate arched molding over the doorway; it separated crowfeather-dark roofing from the down-white exterior, snaking down to highlight the building's foundation. Black seemed to surround the white house from all angles except the sides, sandwiching the delicate lightness between bold hands. It was striking, yet easy enough on the eyes to be regarded as a quaint home from afar; purpled dusk-light softened the view.

Will paused at the door, waiting for Chiyoh's footsteps to catch up to his; she remained a few steps behind from habit. He bent to lift the key from under a potted plant at the entrance, admiring the smoothness and individuality of its teeth. Placing it in the lock, he opened the door with a squeak before pocketing the little key. Will kept the door open to let Chiyoh in, sliding his thumb over the key's edge; a steady bite came with each pass.

He let her lead, leaving the door open behind him to air out the thick lavender freshener crowding the foyer. Will pushed his way through the acrid cloud, walking across an ornate floor reminiscent of dark-age encaustic tile; the kitchen mosaic sported a similar pattern, he remembered.

The hall opened up to the living room, where Chiyoh paused to look around. The main space lay bright and open, even during dusk; Will had to squint looking about. While the light was not direct, wide windows seemed to cover the room in an orange sheet, setting the dining table aflame. Will placed a tentative hand on it, fingers turning hot and glowing beneath the sunlight, and drew them away before any ashes could gather. The fire-bright light's partner shadows were a subtle, deep purple, smoothing edges and blurring whatever harshness was present. Will went past Chiyoh, wandering a bit towards a massive window that gave a full view of the ocean, cliffs, boat and all.

Will imagined Hannibal bobbing up and down in the boat, their home for weeks long and tiring, made of healing. It was the loom on which their shroud of Turin had been woven, stained with sacred sweat and blood; they were wrapped in its threads. This house's tile was beautiful yet cold, its walls bright yet blinding; it was not home. While the boat- the Nola- was not truly home, either, Will had known it intimately for years. Bought with his own money soon after leaving home, it had been his first bed before Wolf Trap; it was where he'd lain a boy and risen a man. It had served him well on his months-long journey to Florence many years ago; it was where he'd fallen lost and stood found. It had carried him and Hannibal across the sea; it was where he'd slept dead and awakened alive.

He suppressed a jump of surprise as Chiyoh stepped up to his side, speaking sharp and susurrant, "Did you have a good time, alone with him?"

Will inhaled with quick, cold breath, "Good?" held it, "No," exhaled.

He turned to Chiyoh, following her eyes- how they rested on the boat dancing in the distance. He settled his attention on it, as well, letting his mind sink into the world that struck ocean-rocks. With slow blinks, Will brought his thoughts to life with lips fluttering like desperate wings, "It was more like being the redstart feeding the cuckoo chick. You raise them, feed them- and after they outgrow the nest, they stay."

"You still keep them after they've killed off all the other chicks. They convince you they are yours, and you theirs."

He noted her inclusion of killing kin- a pointed remark- but moved to the second half of her words. Chiyoh was trying to imply that their dance was of mutual blindness; Will knew it to be of true sight. He defended the knots of his and Hannibal's entanglement, hiding their true complexity from her, spitting, "Does it matter?" He failed to restrain a snarl of contempt.

Chiyoh's eyes sparkled, crystal that held the black sky and all its stars. It was eerily close to Hannibal's gaze of amusement, only cold and dark- a blue-tinted blackness that Will was not familiar with. She made as if to respond, but instead turned towards the kitchen, where Will followed.

It was relatively quiet atop the bluff; Will couldn't hear the crashing of waves from the house. Even in such quiet, a soft hum bled through the walls, along with a green, living saltiness that the pale blue walls swallowed up and digested. The house seemed alive with color, though not in the usual bright sense; mud-colored patterned parquet sat beneath Will's feet, thrumming with trees' heartbeats. The walls, while man-made, had been built up not by bricks, but by wind-rounded stones. The building housed a heart of organic, pulsing warmth; it pumped blood warmer than Wolf Trap, more human than the Lecter Mansion, flushing any apparent iciness through arteries, away, and sending heat through its veins, to the fluttering muscle.

Chiyoh went through every room, inspecting each one for what Will could only assume was Hannibal's safety. Most rooms were painted a gentle blue, some a delicate cream-brown; the only exceptions were the three main bedrooms. Chiyoh neglected the first, almost entirely white with gentle gray and lilac accents; Will lagged behind a minute to step in. There was a lightness to the space, like a breath of fresh air after nights of heads pressed to damp pillows. He ran his fingers through the ermine-mimic blanket draped across the bed, letting the hair color shift with the change of direction.

Will left soon after Chiyoh's footsteps fell away, blending and meeting rich navy carpet. He followed her through the next room, an ocean-dark droplet among waves of seafoam; soft yet severe. Above the simple wooden bedframe hung a tapestry bearing the form of a collared unicorn, splashes of pomegranate falling from the tree above it; Will recognized it as a recreation of the last medieval Unicorn Tapestry. It was a curiosity he did not have time to consider before catching up to Chiyoh's ever-fading footsteps.

The third bedroom was evocative of a wood cabin, dark and cloaked in warmth on all sides, only with skylights overhead that brought cool luminescence to the surroundings. There was a weight to the space, like a pair of arms holding a body tight; he felt constricted, and yet free as in the arms of a lover.

It was in this room Chiyoh ceased her inspection. Will stopped not far behind her, lifting his arms to open a window above his head. Silence passed between them, broken by a truth, "Hannibal is convinced he will have you forever."

Will smiled, something crooked, as he fiddled with a latch, "I think I'm just as guilty of that as Hannibal."

"Then you can see he isn't really the caged bird you say he is," Chiyoh came to his side, lifting the windowpane enough for a breeze to rush in, "and neither are you."

"But you are?"

In the second before her reply, Will brushed away a stray lock fallen over his eyes, floating with the breeze. Chiyoh's eyes passed over the movement, first, before pointing skyward.

"I am the forest surrounding the nest, and the iron wire of the cage."

Will studied her words, adding, "To keep the nestling safe."

"To let the nestling grow healthy with the host's care," Chiyoh corrected.

Will tested the ripples in the water of conversation, navigating the sea for any sight of Chiyoh's opinion of his care for Hannibal. Still in the realm of metaphor, he questioned, "Will the forest shelter the host?"

"If the chick is strong enough to fly alone."

He presented words of assurance wrapped in the promise of flight and independence, "I think its wings will grow strong in time."

Chiyoh's eyes returned to meet his, a shimmering veil of acceptance settling over them, "I think they already have."

The coiled tension around them seemed to dissipate, the only remaining tightness belonging to the room. Will breathed with relief; she didn't look down on him as much as he expected. Chiyoh had spent some time talking to Hannibal these last few days, as he'd been getting out of the cabin more often. Will still kept watch for any midnight escapes, but Hannibal held his leash tight between his own teeth; he preferred silence saturated with Will's presence over the quiet ache loneliness brought.

Will had only heard windswept whispers of conversation between Chiyoh and his beloved, catching the occasional laugh and stretch of syllables that came with talking through a smile. He made sure not to intrude on their conversations- Hannibal would know by smell- but kept quiet vigil in case anything went sour; though he doubted it would turn so between the two.

On that note of lightness, Will left Chiyoh to her own devices; she'd return by night to give Hannibal her personal opinion about the house Will had chosen. On the way down the gravel path, down the hill, down the rocks, down further and further, Will kept a tight fist clenched around the housekey. It impeded his balance just a bit, but kept his mind from mourning the loss of the Nola- a final reminder of his past. The key's teeth nipped at his hand, playfully over its callouses and with blood over its soft hills; the edges sang to him songs of new bread and new wine.

He found Hannibal leaning against the railing, head fixed towards the ocean. Will padded over to him, masking his steps, but was tracked down with scent like the hound's prey; he knew he could not outrun the baying hunter. Nevertheless, a thrill ran through him with each

forlorn attempt, the chance that maybe he would catch Hannibal in primal, thoughtless surprise. Hannibal could not predict him psychologically; Will wanted the same to be true of his body.

Hannibal welcomed him with a stare, blinking with fondness before turning back to face the sea. Will came to his side, pressing a hand lightly to his arm. He asked in meaningless greeting, a gauge, "Did you use the cane?"

"Only the railing," Hannibal stated, relaxing into the touch. Will took this as permission to let his hand travel up Hannibal's shoulder and neck, cupping his face. The held man inhaled, exhaled, "Your fingers smell of metal."

Will pulled the house key out of his pocket, allowing the blunt teeth to pass over the soft pad of his thumb. There were imprints in his palm, sharp and patterned from holding the key tight.

Hannibal's hand fell into place over Will's, conforming to its shape as the giving flesh of a lover bends to the weight of eager lips. In a voice built half of concern, half of curiosity, "Why let it dig into your skin so?"

No touch was without meaning, and Hannibal knew. Will marked his skin with purpose, with care; these were marks of housewarming.

Will voiced his unease, a slight tremble to his tongue, "So I can see the reality of what sits here, in front of me."

"And that is?"

"A new place to stay."

Hannibal pursed his lips in thought, and paused to take the key. He felt it over with skilled fingers, letting the dampness that sat on it from Will's hand return to the air. Will watched the display, imagined how it felt to hold the key with no weight to it- without concern for the meaning behind its existence. Hannibal's hand formed a nest for the key as he looked back out towards the horizon, preaching, "Blood is just as metallic in taste as brass, though its wildness remains indisputable. The scent of skin is ingrained into it."

"It's animal."

"So is metal. We have shaped and fashioned it into our flesh-and-blood world, haven't we? The very beams of the house before us are steel. We will inhabit it and make it human, living, and perhaps animal."

Will talked back to the sermon, a stray ram amongst worshipping sheep, "Metal keeps its shape after it's been bent, but living things break and can never look exactly the same. They are mortal."

Hannibal's leg twitched, an unwilling response to Will's words. He nodded in agreement, "We are not metal, no. But we can smell of it. The animal lives behind the bars."

"We suppress. Hide the scent of blood beneath the scent of metal." Will took back the key, placing it back into his pocket and folding his hands on the railing. Hannibal did the same, though his hands were still in comparison to Will, who squeezed his hands together rhythmically, focusing on the controlled build and release.

"Tell me, Will, will this house be our steel cage, or an organic companion?"

Will spoke thoughtfully, quietly, "Depends on who lives inside."

"Then let us be the shrikes who build the nest upon wooden thorns." Hannibal pushed himself from the railing, steadying himself with a hand. There was confidence to him- a pride, a hope for the future; it was contagious. Hannibal's hope filled Will's chest like flowing water, rising until he all but had to swallow it down; he coughed.

He turned to face Hannibal, giving a ghost-turned-flesh smile. He extended his hand, shivered as Hannibal took it. The man no longer needed much support, but Will was a creature of habit, and Hannibal continued to take his hand.

They went to the bedroom without a word, the air around them thrumming with anticipation; Will's energy was no longer nervous, but restless with wait. He settled into the desk-chair, waiting until Hannibal readied himself and rolled into bed with a grunt.

"Goodnight, Hannibal."

He could barely see the other man's reciprocated "*goodnight*" from the other side of the dark room. Will trusted it was there.

Chapter End Notes

i want to say my neglecting chiyoh is an artistic choice and that i am simply following the show's writing style
she will live in the shadows and only crawl out when you need her
my girl be living the cryptid life
but dont mind my horrid humor, i will let you all know that fun events will soon commence :)

Give us Bread

Chapter Summary

Will knew who he was, had known for years; all that remained was the realization to come to full fruition at Hannibal's loving hand.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"It seems to be rather Gustavian, although more minimalist than those clinging to the Baroque. I find it very appealing in an open-air sense."

"A simple 'I like it' would suffice."

"I love it, dearest Will."

The doorway molding was a nice touch, Hannibal noted, as he accompanied Will through the door. Feet on a flat surface at last, Hannibal was relieved after life at sea and taking on the rocky path behind him. They stepped over the decorative parquet, cane tapping against the floor with a final click as the pair stopped to look around.

The walls were painted a faded navy-teal, with stone accents throughout; it reminded Hannibal of the warm green and stone-chimney at Will's house back in Wolf Trap, except with a purposeful, refined air. While the floors were plain wood throughout most of the house, the corridors sported intricate ornamental tile patterns, much like those found in golden-age palaces; Hannibal liked them. He liked the sunroom and the herb garden, too; with some work, the house could be habitable.

He let out a huff of satisfaction. The day had been spent waiting as Will and Chiyoh moved amenities from the boat to the house, and finally being able to see the famed place was "good"- the only name he could give the feeling. He liked the house- yet another simple feeling- but let it wash over him. The boat had felt too foreign, overwhelmingly full of Will; now, there was freedom in having more than just a single bed to his name. The feeling intensified as Will led him to the bedrooms, leaving Hannibal alone to choose one before him.

His feet floated him to the darkest of the three- ocean-blue and beautifully severe, with the final of the Unicorn Tapestries hung like a prized pelt above the bed. The display had been a favorite of his since he was a child, moreso after seeing the threadwork in person; the dusty historical books that lined Aunt Murasaki's home could not do it justice. While only a replica, the reproduction before him sported every faded thread and loose knot of the original. Its meaning sat heavy on his chest on sleepless, thoughtful nights, filling his mind with fingers dancing, weaving the story of passion and resurrection; now it would sit above his head. This

piece in particular was debated to symbolize the Risen Christ in tandem with the previous tapestries, but was also known to represent a newlywed couple's first night joining the flesh.

Hannibal entertained both. He often thought to combine the two, the new breath of Christ flowing into the lungs of His adoring followers, their fingers penetrating his living, bleeding wounds with disbelieving fervor. A quiet smile played across Hannibal's face at the thought before he turned to the sharp-sweet scent in the doorway.

Will stepped in, tentatively, before perching on the wooden bedframe. Even with shoes on, the thick carpet veiled his footsteps beneath plush thread; the wood of the bed creaked beneath his weight in contrast.

The man sat in silence, taking in the room with no sign of starting a conversation until Hannibal spoke, "I have to say, Will, I applaud your effort. This house has very much met my expectations."

Eyes still poring over the rich blue walls, Will questioned, "And not exceeded them?"

"I don't find it sufficiently interesting," Hannibal said, glaring at the underwhelmingly small vanity; there was barely enough room, even with the bathroom included, for what Will had brought of his meager possessions.

Will's lips twitched with a concealed smile, eyes meeting his own, "You will."

Giving a flicker of amusement, Hannibal made to bend and unpack a plain brown duffel bag, bracing his hips against the bed to stay standing. He felt Will watching out of the corner of his eye- watching, assessing, his physical abilities; he could smell the chains of restraint Will wrapped around himself, tugging at them with teeth instead of breaking the chain methodically, coolly. Hannibal managed to take out some clothing and shelf it, walking over to the nearby dresser with careful, shuffling footsteps before again leaning against the bed.

Will's unusual silence filled the space, chain rattling no more, this time accompanied by Hannibal's own quiet; there was a peace to it, to this silence. Hannibal felt no need to make conversation as he had at sea, fighting over the crash of waves against walls. The house stood soft, only letting in slivers of sound from the roiling Atlantic below, giving him room to breathe and speak.

Even though the place was freer, there were objectively more objects and decorations than there were on Will's boat. In the shared silence, Hannibal decided on studying the tapestry before him. He only found himself tangled in its threads when Will released the knot around him, remarking with a hint of a smirk, "I knew you'd like this room."

"Is that so?" To be caught off-guard by Will's smile-wielded sword was becoming less of a rare occurrence, and more a new habit he'd have to break. Hannibal stretched his neck upwards to recalibrate, a companion to Will's own attempts to ease a trembling heart, and began his attempt to bare the depths of this palace-room his love all with a question, "Are you familiar with the Unicorn Tapestries, Will?"

"I'm familiar."

With a pleased expression, one made of knowing and pride, Hannibal continued, "Then you know they can be interpreted in several ways, one of which is the life, death and resurrection of Christ."

"I prefer to think it's simply the life, death and taming of a wild unicorn," Will said behind a veil of dispassion, concealing his eagerness to see Hannibal's reaction.

Hannibal could tear the veil with a single swipe of his claws, but entertained his beloved's game. "Yet another view. Though I find it more meaningful when viewed through a religious lens."

"It doesn't have to be- could just be the story of an animal fighting for its life."

"It's entirely possible," Hannibal recoiled at the jab of simple fact, attempting to imbue it with more meaning, more than Will wanted to tell him, "It is also theorized that the tapestries can represent a wedded couple in the throes of passion."

Will knelt on the bed with a sideways glance at the other man, extending a hand to run his fingers over the tapestry. Hannibal watched the bed dip beneath Will's weight, saw his thighs press against pillows for leverage as his fingers graced fabric, braced against the wall. It was a display of adoration- supplication, even- begging the tapestry to speak its beauty to him. His lips moved without words for only a second, closed, then opened again to warble a quiet, questioning melody, "it's the pomegranates, right?"

Hannibal could not kneel beside Will in returned prayer, his legs too weak, but moved as close as possible- enough to feel the outskirts of forbidden-fruit heat. He leaned in, placing his index finger over Will's own to point, "You can see how the liquid drips onto the unicorn's white coat. Some say it is blood- others, mere pomegranate juice."

Will stilled. Hannibal disbelieved the miracle only for a moment, knowing his mind was running rampant just beneath the skin; after all, what he could always predict in mind, he could not always predict in body. His theory would be proven truth, as after contemplation mimicking a marble form, Will spoke in challenge, "Depends on the context. If the unicorn is Christ reborn, it could be blood."

"The context holds no importance if blood is just as sweet as fruit," Hannibal replied, drawing his hand away from Will's and planting it firmly on the bed, creating a valley of its own.

"Pomegranates can symbolize love and fertility, as blood does life and passion," Will continued, pausing before speaking with genuine wonder, "Do you think the weaver knew the myth of Hades and Persephone?"

Hannibal observed as Will sat back on his knees, distancing himself from the composition and moving towards Hannibal's bed-bound hand. The two objects, now drawn together by gravity, seemed to circle each other as he considered Will's question, "To Persephone, Hell was Heaven."

"Or heaven was hell," Will added, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed before standing with a grunt, "it's different for everyone."

Hannibal mourned the loss of bed-weight, voicing his disappointment in metaphor, "We all have our own personal hell."

"Or heaven."

He nodded, voicing the stinging ache Will's presence brought, "They could be one and the same; one can find pleasure in hell's pain."

Here, Will faltered.

His eyes darted from Hannibal to the floor with embarrassing transparency, processing the words; Hannibal wished he could see the rocks and stream flowing and churning in Will's mind with full clarity. Instead, he was gifted with a sharp dip into cold water, "I'll take the white room next door."

Will left as quietly as he entered. Hannibal was left alone in the dark room, though found it more comfortable than suffocating; its similarity to his Baltimore mansion was striking. While the mansion had not been a home, there was some level of familiarity with the space that he appreciated. The tar-thick darkness was a balm that soothed Hannibal's frayed edges as he rolled onto the bed, face pressed into the liquid-blue pillows that had touched Will's flaming skin just minutes earlier. He breathed it in, seeing the flowing, pouring scent of fabric mixing with soft-sharp damp, formed of Will and Will alone. There was a heat to the scent, pillows marked over talk of pomegranates and passion that birthed a low, coiling fire in Hannibal's stomach, bright and pink and barely tame.

He felt his cheeks flush, warming the soft fabric beneath him- such warmth could be both the creator of lust and mother of comfort; the latter proved to be true. Comfortable- not burning- warmth flowed over Hannibal's body, cementing his descent into exhaustion. The still, familiar darkness paired with remnants of his beloved's scent dragged him into a world devoid of sight and sound- a world full of silence and sleep.

~

Dinner would not be extravagant; Will settled for using up the last of their reserves from the Nola. He'd have to visit a local market the next day, the nearest one being at least half an hour away; it could be a journey out into the world for Hannibal as well, Will mused, and took note to prepare any supplies in case the trip exacerbated their injuries.

Will passed by Hannibal's bedroom on the way to the kitchen, catching a glimpse of his prone form on the bed; he hadn't even bothered to drape the covers over his head. A twinge of pity made itself known in Will's chest, driving him towards the sleeping man. He measured the risk of waking Hannibal, instead opting to find a spare sheet and covering him in a thin cloak of white- just enough to trap the gentle heat emanating from his still body. Will cupped a hand around Hannibal's face, cradling the relaxed features in an attempt to gauge his consciousness; Hannibal kept still under the touch. The smell of dinner would likely wake him, Will knew, and left the other alone to prepare their first meal in their new house.

The evening was filled with simple, practical tasks that calmed Will over the next few hours. He organized bags and their contents, cut vegetables with steady hands, hummed to the constant hits of knives against wooden cutting-boards, played the roles directed by recipes as an actor in a theatre; stable and structured enough to ease his mind and adjust. He recalled his first year with Molly, squeezing old, familiar habits through the cracks to spill into their cabin suffocated by wilderness. Bringing some sense of the past, of familiarity, made the ever-shifting world bearable to him.

The past he left behind kept the shape of a dust-bound shadow, built of people and events and concepts all but abstract. The past Will carried with him, on the other hand, nested inside his chest with an intangible body- one made of emotion and empathy and scars that broke from their mental boundaries and seared themselves into his skin. Amongst the weeds of others lay the tree-sturdy pillar that was Will Graham; he held in his branches the smallest of birds that bore scar-tissue seeds of truth in their stomachs. To Will, the abstract was as solid as any bone, as unbreakable as any steel bar. Even committed to the hospital for the criminally insane, even on the verge of death, even lost in Hannibal's mind, Will kept the lighthouse of his own personal becoming ever-blinking, ever-glowing for his beached ships. The soft wrongness of childhood warning sirens faded into a sign of seaborne hope and stability. Will knew who he was, had known for years; all that had remained, until now, was the realization to come to full fruition at Hannibal's loving hand.

The rhythm Will had found was disrupted as blood bloomed from his thumb and onto the thirsty skin of a fresh carrot slice. He fought back a hiss, cursing the misplaced knife and reaching for a nearby bandage. The injury was not large in comparison to the scars adorning his body, but a cloth bandage seemed appropriate; a familiar object, one that knew his hands as well as Hannibal's.

Tending to the wound was lonely, as it had been aboard the boat with Hannibal unconscious. The first night was the coldest, and yet the warmest of all; the worry that swamped any rational thought was calmed by Chiyoh's protectiveness towards Hannibal, but accompanied by the man's complete and utter silence. Hannibal started talking only hours later- albeit incoherently- but his first moments out of the watery womb were of silence; no tears, no screams, no moans of pain- only silence.

That was what Will remembered most, as he watched the river of blood from his finger trickle into a stream. He remembered the world after packing and bandaging Hannibal's wounds- the quiet so strong it made his ears ring as red sang its pulsating swan-song into his bloodstained mouth.

It was quiet now, but with a dull ache better left in Will's past- a past without Hannibal so close. He shut the wound with unusual speed, deciding that no mere cut would halt his momentum; Will set three dishes on the dining table. It had been once fire-soaked, earlier, now found bathed in cool blue from the quieting sky. The plates glowed with bright yet soothing reflections, catching the surrounding fire-mimic lamps and wrapping the false flames in velvet-rich blue. The hues fell from windows and walls onto pristine porcelain plates, catching Will's eye with their glimmering reflections; most of the room was dark, almost violet-blue from the growing shadows, save the dining table with proper warm lighting.

As Will sat to enjoy the meal in peace, his food held no more light than Hannibal's, whose lay cold and untouched; all was made equal except their very presences. This made dinner a relatively quiet affair, sans the clatter of knife and fork against teeth.

Will was entering his room, shaking his hands to flick soapy droplets from his fingers, when he heard footsteps along the corridor. They were solid and clear as if against stone, growing muffled and creaky as Hannibal's feet found where tile melted into wood. Will saw the journey in his mind's eye, watching with extended proprioception as Hannibal reached the kitchen, standing before the reality of a meal alone. He took a deep breath in tandem with the other man, relishing the stinging realization that rolled off him in waves of sour sweetness; Hannibal was disappointed.

He felt no satisfaction from Hannibal's ache. Will only listened a moment longer as the other slid his chair back, taking a knife in hand and starting his first solitary meal in weeks. The fact tugged at Will's chest, if only slightly; he'd kept at Hannibal's side ever since they fell, a perpetual mourner and watcher. Solitude's sting was deadened in Hannibal's eyes, but tore at his skin with purpose beneath glassy windows; guilt slithered into Will's mouth at the knowledge. He knew he should go to Hannibal, to keep him company; instead, Will turned and opened a bag that sat untouched on his bed.

He removed the bag's contents with great care not to make noise. Clothing muffled any impact from his rough hands as Will opened and closed drawers, filling them with an array of simple necessities- light shirts, an abundance of socks, sweaters in muted earth tones akin to the house's own. A standing closet lay empty save a sand-stained windbreaker; Will mourned the loss of his wool coats, left behind with their water-soaked heaviness. The constant pressure of their weight was a soft but noticeable presence, less stiff than the lone coat before him; he missed them. He missed many things, keeping them in a past left far behind.

More gutted carcasses were thrown onto the bed as Will unpacked, traveling back and forth between the narrow bathroom and white-walled bedroom to arrange trinkets and toiletries. He came to appreciate the room's simplicity, feet dancing on plush silver carpet as he paced around, hands gliding over cabinets a shade between gray and lilac. As Will lay his personal medical supplies into a spare drawer, he fell back onto his bed with a sigh and buried his face into the fur at its foot-end.

He didn't have a moment of rest to spare before Hannibal rose from his chair with a grunt. Will listened to the strained footsteps, heavy against parquet as Hannibal went to the sink. The accompanying running water lasted only a minute before the walking resumed, Hannibal limping towards him at a disheartening pace. The door, open only a sliver, allowed Will a glimpse of Hannibal's averted eyes as the man passed, a slow shadow in the corridor; Will pushed away his own guilt-stricken eyes in return.

The door to Hannibal's room opened and closed with a loud squeak. A cascade of air could be heard from behind Hannibal's door, heavy and shaking. Will heard no more footsteps; the man stood at the closed door, still, not touching his bed or sweeping over the floor, breathing.

In response, Will stepped past the doorway to his room and entered the corridor, feet padding softly on the tile; Hannibal went quiet.

"You can hear me," Will said, voice even as he steadied himself with a hand on the wall.

"And you, me."

He crawled towards Hannibal's door; sensing discomfort, he proposed, "We can go see the garden out back," Will listened for any sound of approval, giving again, "or take in the view from there."

"You do not need to make excuses to bring me outside, Will, but the former sounds greatly appealing," Hannibal caved, smirk poking out from beneath his lips as the door swung open. Will saw the flash of teeth fade as quick as it had appeared, allowing Hannibal to take his arm. The man followed, uncharacteristically unfamiliar with his surroundings and allowing Will to lead.

As cool night air graced his face, Will felt the slightest of shivers escape Hannibal's cage of a body.

"Cold?" he asked, pulling away to let Hannibal sit on the first chair to land under his hand. Will watched as the man winced- with pain, at first- then with displeasure as the plastic lawn chair bowed slightly beneath his weight.

Hannibal settled into it soon enough; Will could only assume he accepted his inescapable fate as he responded in kind, "Only when deprived of your warmth."

Will cocked his head with what he could only call warm animosity- a loving hostility that twisted itself into mockery, "Romancing me so soon after falling apart, are we?" The statement was followed by Will pulling up a chair for himself, directly across from Hannibal, primed for a conversation.

"You've developed a curious habit of referring to me as 'we,' Will," Hannibal commented, needing to voice his observation before leaning back in the chair and bringing a finger to his lips.

Will's eyes narrowed. "And what, pray tell, do you have to say about that?"

"I simply want to point it out to you. It could hold meaning that I am not aware of."

Hannibal's finger fled from his lips and extended into a point; the gesture filled Will with an unwelcome familiarity, memories of deception and snares around necks. He fueled his next words with sting, spitting venom in tribute to the past, "**I'm** fully aware of what **I** say, Doctor Lecter."

He watched with satisfaction as Hannibal's lips turned up, first, before falling with a scowl. His eyes shined with offense, voice lowering with freshly-bloomed disappointment, "Will you wield my title as a weapon every time you want to cut the cords of our intimacy?"

Will noted the use of 'want to,'- noted the lack of its omission. Hannibal saw no weight to his shying away from closeness; rather, he saw it as an attempt to sever their intimacy. Will

found Hannibal's misunderstanding of his motives unusual- amusing, even. His distance was not to run from intimacy, but to let Hannibal run towards it.

Will decided to let veiled words intertwine with truth, speaking his grievance aloud, "I wield it no more than you do your hesitation." He took in a hurried breath, feeling its weight before pouring it out with a gust of wind, "You hesitate often. It's new."

Will continued, leaving no room for Hannibal's half-formed words to take flight.

"You cry and beg for me to stay, and I do. I offer you my hand and you take it. We give and take, but you can't give on your own; the only gift you've given me is reciprocation."

"Is that not-"

"Don't," Will cut him off, voice steady but growing in flaming color, "You don't act on your instincts alone. You don't initiate."

"I'm not one to be forward, if you remember."

"Not with others, no. But with me-" Will's eyes darted around, looking for a place to rest as they worked to hold back salt-sting, "You've been forward with me before. You have the potential."

"If I were in your place, I would consider the fact that I could very well be trying to protect you from myself. Three years is an awfully long time to be caged up; you don't know what could be hiding beneath the surface."

Will blinked with shocked amusement, freezing. He could hear the thrashing ocean below before breaking from the stillness, almost laughing out his next words, "Where did you get that idea?"

"It is a common worry for many self-loathing individuals frightened of themselves."

"Too common for the esteemed Hannibal Lecter. You're not scared of yourself." Will's head lowered with a twitch before jolting upwards to meet Hannibal's form, "You're trying to regain your control- not hide its power."

"Is that what I'm doing?"

"Isn't that what you did after Muskrat Farm? Got me to push you away so I would reel myself back in at your will," his eyes stilled, resting on Hannibal's chest as it heaved, in stark contrast to his own calm. He stood and pushed the chair back after a contemplative pause, making his claim, "You don't want to have anything in life that's not my attention. And the only way you want it is provided by my own hand."

"I only want what's best for both of us."

"And I want the same."

Hannibal rose from his chair, a single wrinkle of frustration written over his brow, "Are you applying yourself to my perspective, Will, or waiting for me to apply myself to yours?"

"I am- " Will shifted his weight from his toes to the ball of his foot, leaning back ever so slightly. "I'm gauging your capacity for overt action through my own. Your ability to act without guidance."

The cannibal stepped forward, speaking with tooth and tongue, "You assume I need guidance."

"I don't assume; I see," Will blinked faster now, swallowing as he took the cardinal step back-the leap that tempts empty, dripping jaws.

"So you do." With a sharp breath in, Hannibal lunged, coming towards Will with such speed as to place the accompanying exhale to his plush, parted lips.

Will took in the other's breath as his chest swelled with tension's catch and release, its tremendous rise and fall; the red floodwaters of relief breaking the dam of a starved heart, its walls resonant with beats of blood. The loss of lover's teeth drew him towards Hannibal as the man pulled away, catching him and pulling him into his lungs to whisper, "See?"

Will could only hum a trembling note of agreement as his body flung its weight into Hannibal's, teeth brushing teeth with a collision equal to the blurring of thought and feeling, of pain and pleasure, of ache and relief. But amidst the kiss riding on fire, desperate hands did not wander, and pleading cries did not spill out into night's cloak; with a hand weaved into strands of hair, Will pulled away.

Dying embers lay drowned mere seconds after as Hannibal stilled in silent tandem. Eyes searched over the cracks and curves of skin, pleading the unsaid 'why?' with fluttering lashes and untamed whites; Will watched with awe as Hannibal's pupils flew across his face like a scattering of light through a canopy of trees. His hand was tense in Hannibal's hair, shaking with the effort.

"Will."

His eyes could not meet Hannibal's. Hot, burning breath fell over his mouth- his own or Hannibal's, he could not say. He would not give him the satisfaction of capture.

"You can let me go."

Not a command, but permission; he could act only if he wanted to. Will shivered, releasing the taut strands and earning a sigh of relief. He met Hannibal's gaze this time, long and cold, hands trembling.

Will glanced at the bright window behind them, giving a soft, "*I'm going inside*," before shutting the ocean's roaring hum and Hannibal's deafening thoughts behind him.

hiya

hope the delay wasn't too long for everyone looking forward to this!

Torn

Chapter Summary

Will's gaze softened with understanding, though visible only in his own imagination. He remained a figure of molten gold, hot to the touch, seeping into the space between himself and Hannibal; the soft underbelly beneath was yet to be eviscerated by the cannibal. The trembling bloodthirsty released a breath, pupils shrinking with the only mortal marker of fear before weakly retorting, "*What are you implying?*"

Chapter Notes

(Also see beginning of fic for this note.)

From this point on, many of the chapters will be nsfw. For artistic choice and my own comfort as a trans man, there will be lots of metaphor overtop. Any explicit reference to both Will and Hannibal's anatomy will be with the terms cock, growth, groin, sex, hole, foreskin, rim, and prosthetic (when specifically mentioning strap-ons).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Will woke alone.

He rose before the sun, faint blue spilling onto his room's pale walls. Pushing bedsheets aside, he watched as slivers of red and yellow wrestled with bruised blue-black to make way for the royal sun. The display carried on as Will made breakfast, hand flying to shield his face when light forced itself onto his eyeline. Food was prepared with a lowered head, lying in wait for gold to rise high enough; Will would not hide his face from God- but the sun was another matter.

Will ate alone. The sun rose above the windows, offering respite from its rays of ridicule and allowing a meal in peace. Shadow followed him to his room, where he sat in silence behind a shut door. He could hear Hannibal outside, crooked gait slowing for a fraction of a second as he passed Will's room.

They had nearly merged into one being, on his boat, though Will had done all in his power to avoid the outcome. He had done what was necessary for Hannibal's survival- feeding, bathing, comforting- and would now give them both the gift of space. His room offered a teacup of time to think, to unravel the strands they had woven into a net on the sea.

He'd wanted to give Hannibal a shred of independence, at first. He craved that control, Will knew, and to lose it so soon after freedom from bars was devastating; Hannibal would never

voice it. He would speak of the future, or of Will's heart, but never of his own; that would have to be ripped out with tender claws. When Hannibal found his independence, though, the crack between them split into an open-mouth ravine, screaming with silent gasps of breath. He slipped from Will's hold like water from the fisherman's well-loved stream; regardless of familiarity, both are a force of nature. Both draw away and allow the other to move, to flow, to coax and pry out truth.

Hannibal left, and Will sat alone.

Push-and-pull moved him through the rest of the day, pulling him close to contemplate his own drawing away, pushing him far to immerse himself in Hannibal's determined solitude. He could almost feel dark waves filling the floorboards beneath, feel them swelling and bursting under his feet as he sat still on his bed. Misshapen clocks and heavenly visions no longer filled Will's mind, but phantom-waves pushed time forward by nightfall; stars filled the sky far too fast. The blue shadows of morning had morphed into black ghosts of night before his eyes, thrusting him out of isolation with blasts of cold breath into the warm light of shelter.

Much to Will's surprise, the house was well-lit. It was almost identical to his own setup the day before, when he made dinner as Hannibal sat in wait. Now, in this brother-light, a full plate lay opposite the empty end of the table. Another set sat atop the freshly-wet dishrack, crying its lonely, unseeing tears

Warmth bloomed in Will's chest at Hannibal's gesture. He imagined the man's reticent spectre limping about the kitchen, holding and cutting open packets of what little food Will had brought, setting a table for two and eating alone. Will could almost hear him sitting down with a groan and a sharp breath in to calm the sacryn bells announcing the descent of his strained legs.

Even with Hannibal's echoes seeping from ever-absorbent walls, the cannibal himself was out of sight. Will approached the other's room, letting his socked feet tap against the floor as a warning; he need not knock, even for false politeness. Pressing a tentative palm to the door, he pushed the creaking mass open to reveal a lifeless room.

After adrenaline-wide glass-blown pupils tore into spectral rooms and chairs, Will paced about the kitchen, watching eye-torn flecks of guilt bubble and burst in his chest. He had spent the day in a haze of reminiscence, hearkening back to lone floating nights- to nights without Hannibal, lost in his own mind; Hannibal was not one to do the same. The house was too empty, too bright, too hollow with one half lost. Dark tendrils of sweet empathy wrapped themselves around the front door, bringing Will along with them to escape into the night. As he nearly sprinted on doe-feet through the door, Will found Hannibal's ghost rushing out before him, running, leaving behind the empty spaces with Will's shell of a presence inhabiting but one; what to Will seemed empty in fact was to Hannibal empty in feeling.

A screaming hawk with eyes removed, Will calmed under night's velvet cover. The blinded hunter circled his land, finding raw flesh kneeling in fresh dirt.

Hannibal sat in a tilled garden, placed in the open palm between endless sea and boundless land. His head was raised before Will even turned the corner, eyes shining with indignant rain

or relieved droplets- Will could not tell.

"Welcome back."

Will decided on comfort over cruelty, an attempt to still his own racing heart, "I never left."

Diffused light from the house's windows illuminated Will's hands just enough for them to be visible- tense with the echoes of a clenched fist. He saw Hannibal's eyes narrow with a squint before the man turned away to resume the gentle dragging of blackened rake through earth.

Dropping to his knees beside Hannibal, Will made conversation to fill the day's emptiness, "I forgot there was a garden."

"There will be a proper one, once I replace a fair few of these plants." Hannibal gave a glance with hands that grabbed for approval, "Some decorative shrubs would be appropriate, don't you think, Will?"

"I do." He took a moment to note the circle of uprooted fruit and vegetable plants around them both, forming a barrier between garden and world. Behind them, the house glowed ever-harsh, ever-sharp, light softening as it passed over white plaster-wall. Before them, the earth's cool, soft darkness worked to free Will's tongue; it found its form where black sky met onyx ocean. He managed to word a question, only a mote of bite present, "Why the sudden destruction of the previous owners' property?"

"These won't suit my tastes. And it is no longer their property, after all."

"Our tastes," Will corrected.

The other gave a rushed sound of amusement before standing, hand reaching towards Will for leverage; he pulled them away at the realization of action. Hannibal faltered, lips trembling in time with legs as he regained his balance, shaking dirt off his ungloved hands, "Now, please excuse my leaving so soon after we reunite, but I need to get cleaned up."

He left with silent steps before Will could utter a farewell. Alone again by Hannibal's hand, he lay kneeling in the upturned earth; Will felt himself both worshipped and worshipper in this position, surrounded by the newly destroyed plants, knees folded in earth-bound supplication. It was nothing more than an image- not solid enough for tangible vision, or even for comparison- only a fleeting idea.

He broke the quiet prayer with a hand in the dirt. His fingers tensed and relaxed, catching and releasing soft flecks of black. As he lifted them from their mother, they fell in clumps; invisible water particles tied each molecule to the other, gravity pulling them down as one. What fell from Will's hand to the ground landed not to his own design, nor to Hannibal's plan of careful preparation; each fell to its own will- to gravity's will, rather- pulled down and colliding in a predictable, predetermined pattern. The most natural course was not an evergoing battle between forces, but a collision known to all as universal law.

Will blinked. He stood, shaking the lawful ground from his hands as Hannibal had; it fell like warm, black rain, heated by collector's hands. Leaving the dirt to soak back into its source, he

reentered the house to find it humming with rainfall's soft murmur- born of Hannibal's room. With more tact than before, Will crawled towards the door, peering through the crescent-thin sliver of an entrance left ajar.

Directly across from the doorway stood a humbly cramped bathroom. Fixed at its end lay a steaming shower, fog curling above frosted glass and giving shape to formless rays of lamplight; Hannibal stood below this display. His back to the door, Will could make out a blur of pink flesh, broad and sharp, darkening and slimming to form a waist, dipping low only to curve up against tensed thigh. Streams of water splattered against the glass as Hannibal raised his arms, creating peach-pink watercolor blooms in thin air; Will could only describe the unsuspecting figure, found, as art.

A bright streak of paint flowed sideways, depriving itself of water with a turn of the shower handle. The glass door opened immediately after, leaving Will to breathe the shallow gulps of a deer caught frozen before fate pierces its hide. Paint turned to skin as Hannibal's fingers grasped air before hooking the towel hung nearby. Flesh disappeared behind glass again, cesious softness mixing with scarlet heat, before reemerging as a face buried in cotton. The still-stricken observer watched as Hannibal lowered the towel to his nose, closing his eyes to breathe in its scent; Will turned just as the man's breath caught in his throat.

Feet hit the barely-creaking parquet with remarkable softness as Will ran, only losing their ease of motion when his hips caught a table's edge. His meal, cooling with Hannibal's absence, jumped with the force of the collision; Will let out a curse before sprinting over to the nearest couch to feign peace before Hannibal could suspect flight. His legs sank into its cushions, muscles burning from the sudden exertion.

Will's breaths had just begun to even out when the floorboards behind him creaked under new weight. He dared not look up, knowing Hannibal to be above him; he waited for the man to sit and confront him. Will tilted his head to Hannibal, disguising it in a glimpse of a flickering ceiling light. The flash softened the edges of Hannibal's face before they regained their skull-like form- made to line catacomb walls. The features were soon obscured by hands darkening Will's field of vision.

"It's awfully rude to watch people in moments considered private."

Will swallowed, pulling down the hesitation clawing through his chest. "Should I be ashamed?"

"Only if you consider it a shameful act. What makes it different from any other moment in time?" Hannibal circled the couch, raising Will and the cushion into the air as he sat. *"Tell me, Will, what did you see?"*

He felt Hannibal's eyes on his, which stood averted, trying not to be caught in the other's nets as they spoke in song long unsung.

"Your request is bordering on outright lie, Hannibal."

Caught, Hannibal's lip curled with distaste as he deflected, *"I'm curious to know what you saw."*

"Or rather what I'll do." Will drew his gaze skyward again, sorting his thoughts in creations of air. "I saw," he tamed his voice to barely a whisper, imbuing it with unimaginable frailty, "color upon color blurring, bleeding into each other. Piling up until they resembled a man."

"Have you considered the reverse?"

Will quieted and took in Hannibal's elaboration intently, gaze flicking between mortal hands and the heavens as he spoke.

"Man disintegrates until nothing but formless pigment is left, pure and monstrous in its lack of purpose." He finished the sentence with fingers bent like claws, signing "monster".

Will's words passed through the shape of a smile at the explanation, condescending in their delivery, "I've considered that is what you would see." He spoke, firm and knowing, "I don't lack purpose. Or direction."

"No, you don't."

Out the corner of his eye, Will saw Hannibal turn away; he risked a glance, in this moment. The man wore a dark robe- a relic from the past, bearing ghosts of midnight wanderings. Its familiarity struck Will with intent- intent to move in fate's direction, intent to fall again into the arms of deaf gods and wrestle the whip of the world from their limp hands.

"Observe me in motion, or participate?" Will asked, passing a tongue over anticipation-dry lips.

"Observe." A lie.

"Would you really?" The knot of apprehension tightening in Will's stomach broke with Hannibal's words- the perfect opportunity for poking and prodding. Will calmed, letting his mouth speak his mind, creating clouds of taunt and proposition, veiling one behind the other, "Or do I have to bait you, still? Keep you on your toes?"

"I believe the only person you're keeping dancing on their toes is yourself, dear Will. Don't dance yourself to death; spring is yet to come."

"Not to death. Not unless you join me." Will inched imperceptibly closer to flesh-tearing teeth, voice lowering, "Let what surrounds us- be it God or forces of nature- take us."

Hannibal's eyes darkened with something akin to pain- only an echo of it- but pain, nonetheless. Will recognized its subtlety, last felt descending through dark sky at the speed of gravity; his gaze softened with understanding, though visible only in his own imagination. He remained a figure of molten gold, hot to the touch, seeping into the space between himself and Hannibal; the soft underbelly beneath was yet to be eviscerated by the cannibal. The trembling bloodthirsty released a breath, pupils shrinking with the only mortal marker of fear before weakly retorting, *"What are you implying?"*

"Gravity."

With barely a warning, Will pressed his soft lips to a set of bared teeth, deeply known, and the fall began anew.

Air slipped through delicate strands of hair as Will dragged Hannibal down towards him, a mass of blood and bone meeting irises of breaking, frothing blue. Air escaped caged lungs as Will's back hit the couch cushions, any remnant of oxygen dying in his throat from the impact. He could drown in this feeling- a thought so familiar to bruised skin as liquid darkness enveloped them both.

Will's first attempt at taking a breath was met with wet warmth and weight spread over his chest. Hannibal kissed like he killed- steady, calm, head pressing down with sudden violence to snap his jaw closed. Searching lips closed around muscle and meat, slowing as they took their fill, finding enough control to close down once more. Will offered his mouth to the cannibal without hesitation; Will trusted. Will trusted Hannibal to move predictably, here, all hunger and starvation. Will trusted Hannibal to take from him without remorse, without fear of hurting. Will trusted Hannibal to let himself be taken from, laid bare before him in a tapestry of woven vein and nerve.

Synchronicity in mouth translated to body as Hannibal broke their kiss, pressing his face to Will's neck and taking in one breath- another, another, another- ribs bursting with wind. Will turned towards him in search of heat from his neck lost to the other's lungs, eyes instead focusing on tousled hair. Hannibal's face, poorly hidden in the crook of his neck, spoke to Will in patches of blood-bloom flush; Hannibal was holding onto his veil with white-knuckle hands.

"Hannibal," Will croaked, the name barely scratching its way through his throat, tight from the weight of breath and body overtop. He shivered at the slight brush of tongue against the shell of perked ear as Hannibal let out a grunt of command. The man pressed a finger to Will's lips, stitching them closed with nothing but a gesture; Will kept quiet for fear of losing the soft yet skin-breaking touch.

Marble columns rose from either side of Will's head, holding eyes of tumbling-sky burgundy. He could do nothing but look up, look into them, and bear witness to their explosive unraveling.

Hannibal's hips stuttered in song before finding rhythm against the fabric of the other's trousers. The heat pooling in Will's groin ached in time with fluttering heart-beats, stimulation just out of reach as Hannibal rutted against his clothed thigh. A haze fell over the cannibal's eyes as he settled into the movement, made of pure, devastating desperation; Will was enamored by its honesty. What had only broken through the waves surrounding them at sea, only to fall below the water again, was now breaching the surface with full force; Will smiled at how quickly, how fiercely, how unashamedly it had come ashore.

Hannibal leaned down to kiss Will again, tongue lingering for a fleeting second over smile-exposed teeth before falling to Will's lower lip. He suckled on it with a quiet fervor, as the weak newborn does their single source of nourishment. The hungry mouth kept moving, lower, descending to Will's neck to leave halos of red across the vulnerable stretch of skin; it stopped at his pumping carotid. The cannibal's mouth stilled as his wet tongue flicked over the near-trembling artery.

In this stillness, all but Hannibal's hips stop moving. Will was being pushed into the couch with mindless, mechanical thrusts- almost comforting in their consistency. He could expect their timing, know that one is followed by the next; he could sink into blissful predictability.

Will did not enjoy this for long, though; even clouded by instinct, Hannibal did not favor predictability. Hands ripped Will's buttoned shirt in time with the gleaming edge of an eager tooth grazing the beating-heart in Will's neck for a moment too long. Will felt all thoughts flow out his head and blood rush through his veins as his pulse sang its frantic swan-song; his arms wrapped around Hannibal's back intuitively, with a jolt, nails digging bloody crescents into the rippling skin. A duet of whimpers escaped both men, dying in the air between their mouths- Will, from prey-fear, Hannibal, from sudden pain.

Hannibal's ever-obedient body betrayed him at the voluntary touch. The cannibal faltered for a second- to Will, an eternity- humanity returning to his darkened pupils. He shook bloodied nails from his back, turning to take a look and allowing Will a breath of relief.

Both men were panting, now, going slack in their restraints to warn the other of what was to come. Hannibal shook himself free as eyes snapped back to Will's. He barely allowed a gasp to reach Will's lips before the full weight of his body closed the gap between lovers' skin, again. He settled his teeth over the slope of Will's shoulder, rutting beginning again in desperation as a searching hand submerged itself in Will's curls. He closed it into a fist to pull, to drown in their violent crashing-wave darkness, rocking them and their bearer to a brutal, ocean-mimic pace. Will let out a yelp as the pressure, gentle yet sharp, ran down his spine and straight to his neglected cock.

"Hannibal." Will's tongue turned solid this time, fighting with a pleasure-cracked voice for its say.

Soft, swollen lips sheathed the daggers buried in Will's shoulder, joining to form the gentle shushing that spilled from between the cannibal's teeth. Will almost gave in to their kindness, to their soothing hum, closing his eyes; in taking his fill, Hannibal had returned to his steady rhythm.

Will would not let Hannibal take him in full. Not until he saw all that lay beneath this new, beastly veil; Hannibal was never as simple as tongue and teeth.

"No-" Will wedged his hands between the vacuum-tight seal of skin against skin, pushing Hannibal up despite a snarl of protest. He could see the dimmed mirrors behind his eyes clearing, sparkling just a bit with frustration at the conjoined pair's separation.

"Tell me what you want."

Hannibal dove right back to fill his mouth with the taste of Will, breaking up a stream of kisses with his answer, whispering, "Don't speak," a mouth to the shoulder, "feel," a mouth to the cradle of collarbone, "appreciate," a mouth to the gentle slope of muscled chest.

Will gasped as Hannibal's teeth grazed his nipple, their sharpness reaching beneath the numb star-shaped scars. "I am," he forced out with thin breaths, "but I need to know what you're going to do to me."

Hannibal paused, lifting his head. He decided to indulge Will, tone losing its rasp as calm returned to his voice, "I am ruthless in my fantasy of tearing you apart," Hannibal pulled his body from Will's to sit back on his heels, "but I have kept enough of my composure not to do so."

"Just enough to remain functional."

"I have to remain well-aware and attuned to your reactions."

"Or I'll break."

A pause, "Precisely," a lie. Hannibal's eyes flickered from Will's lips to his chest, exposed by a salmon-blush shirt with buttons torn. He placed a hand to the rising cage, pushing down slightly on its exhale, soothing, "But do not think of breaking. You think too much, Will. Let me see you."

"You already-"

Hannibal's finger slid from Will's chest to his mouth, resting firm on his tongue. His eyes widened at the intrusion, glaring up at Hannibal with something akin to surprise and embarrassment.

The cannibal did nothing to quell his unease. He only asked, voice light with curiosity, "Tell me, what do you feel?"

Will looked away in half-hearted defiance. In doing so, though, his attention involuntarily fell to his mouth.

Hannibal's finger lay heavy on the flat plane of his tongue.

It tasted of salt.

Hannibal did not flinch as Will's jaw pressed down to test the skin's give- soft as any other flesh. He moved his tongue around the foreign-yet-familiar shape, its tip catching on the edge of a freshly-cut nail. Will felt his tongue wrap around it as Hannibal inched the digit deeper, enough for it to comfortably fill his mouth. It was pleasant, heavy- grounding and warm.

Will couldn't manage the shape of his response around the finger, losing the first words of his sentence to Hannibal's hand, *I feel...* "Good."

The man smiled, soft and sharp, "There you are." He placed a hand to Will's curls, not pulling this time; he only stroked them with a sweetness belonging solely to a beast-turned-man.

"I will tell you what I want to do, now that you will listen. Notice how the mind relaxes with prolonged non-sexual contact."

Relief flooded Will's veins; Hannibal was going to let him know what would happen. He wouldn't fall apart in the eye of the storm anytime soon. While the need to see Hannibal torn apart still ran hot under his skin, it would have to sit buried underground a few lifetimes more; Hannibal would not deny Will the pleasure of seeing him in full.

"I want for you to be embraced, as you have embraced me. To observe you with care, with pain, with the knowledge that you have no obligation to reciprocate."

Will nodded with understanding, pulling Hannibal's fingers along with the movement; this was a gift. He would let Will take his actions and weave them into feeling- empathy through sensuality.

"Do you want me to draw blood?"

Will's heart woke from its reverie and began thrumming against its cage, his hands stiffening and stabbing into the cushion below. He registered the faint sound of a sniff, meeting Hannibal's eyes and seeing his own pained reflection in return.

The cannibal only lowered his gaze to confirm Will's reaction was of fear, and not pleasure. "Not today, then."

Will's eyes sharpened to give a glare, only for all fear to dulled with a pass of Hannibal's free hand over their lids. The hand lingered over them, close enough that Will could feel his heaving breaths bounce from its palm.

"You would greatly benefit from a blindfold, Will. While the absence of one source of sensory input generally intensifies another, you react marvelously to less in certain areas." He removed the hand and placed it to Will's chest again, pressing slightly.

While the physical sensations surrounding Will were tame in comparison to what lay in his previous life, they managed to render him incapable of action. They were not overbearing- just enough to satisfy the constant battle of too much and not enough. The finger in his mouth gave him a point to pay attention to, mouth sucking on it with little interference from shame and consciousness. The steady hand on his chest was another hold, a place to stay grounded and keep from floating away into a mess of thought and scrambling empathy. Will's neck relaxed minutely; he could let Hannibal's warm weight keep his mind in place.

"Another area, here."

Will watched Hannibal's lips move, smoothly, voice falling in volume. The cannibal wriggled the finger still placed in the other man's mouth, disturbing Will's gentle, rhythmic suckling of the digit; Will whimpered.

"And here, too," Hannibal murmured more to himself than to the glassy-eyed man below him. He looked stunning, mind falling quiet from simple physical manipulation.

Will resumed his ministrations the moment Hannibal stopped moving his hand.

"Exquisite. It seems altered states of mind make you almost infantile in your reflexes."

His eyebrows knit together in confusion, irises falling in Hannibal's general direction, refusing to focus. It was not a struggle to comprehend Hannibal's words- in fact, it was quite a thoughtless task, to listen- but unraveling their meaning was another matter.

Hannibal must have noticed, cradling Will's head in his hand, fingers carding through his hair.

"Very well, then. Simple words."

Will closed his eyes and nodded, letting out a deep breath, staying blind for comfort. The darkness of his mind was not entirely empty; Hannibal's sotto-voce words echoed inside its walls. The very prospect of such helplessness in Hannibal's arms would have terrified him, if not for the fact that the man was just that- only a man. If he was a beast, then he was only so in body, not in soul.

Hannibal's hand disappeared from its throne in Will's hair, passing over his exposed stomach to the rim of his pants. It slithered beneath them, cupping his sex in its palm.

Will's eyes fluttered open at the new sensation. Warmth from Hannibal's hand spread not just around the entirety of his cock, but to the ocean-froth white of his thighs, across the hair that dusted his stomach and ran around his smile-shaped scar, through his lungs and to his throat; Will whimpered, this time with little but a desperate prayer on his lips.

Hannibal whisked his hand away, prompting a corresponding flurry of grabbing hands and muffled, pleading cries as Will's hips raised to meet the phantom remnant of touch. The cannibal shushed him yet again, hand falling into the dip where ribs met bony pelvis and stroking, reassuring Will before warning, "I will be removing my finger from your mouth in a minute, so please take your fill."

Will nodded weakly, giving Hannibal's finger an appreciative lick before releasing it from his hold.

"You gave it over without a fight- well done, Will."

"Well done," Will repeated, chest puffing out with the praise.

Hannibal gave a sound of amusement as he hooked his fingers along the edge of Will's pants, pulling them down to his knees. Will shivered at the sudden exposure, the dark hairs of his arms standing alert- moreso than his awareness.

Hannibal noticed the spasm of shivering, remarking, "You will be warm soon enough. But I need your help taking these off," Hannibal punctuated the last few words with gentle tugs on the half-worn trousers. Will caught Hannibal's gaze, giving a bleary-eyed grin as he raised his legs enough for Hannibal to remove the obstructive clothing. Will's arms, heavy with bliss, made to remove the rest of his shirt before Hannibal completed the task in one fell swoop.

The man planted both palms on the twin jut of Will's hips, straddling his bare legs and returning him to a world of sweet warmth. Their lips joined once more, though both men had let night soften their edges; Will lay pliant beneath Hannibal's touch, who had regained enough humanity to lead with a clear head and soft fist.

Will sat in wait, shivering as Hannibal asked- no, commanded- with words that eased their way into his mind, "Stay still. Be good for me."

"Stay still," Will felt his hips tremble with a suppressed roll, "Be good."

Hannibal hummed and slipped off his robe. He wore nothing beneath, concealing true shamelessness with surface-level modesty; Will would laugh, if he had the resolve.

"I'm going to take off your underwear."

Earth-dark curls bounced as Will shook his head, lifting his legs yet again to allow easy removal for Hannibal, who let the soaked fabric fall to the floor.

Clothing left to fade out of their vision, the lovers reunited fully in skin and sweat. One of Hannibal's hands fell to the crying, beating-heart wound between Will's legs, two fingers teasing at its slick entrance, a thumb circling the tip of his blood-swollen cock in anticipation.

A cry rose from Will's throat at the movement, striking the ceiling with relief; direct touch, at last. Hannibal's eyes grew black with need at the sound of hundreds of beating wings, loud as thunder in uniform flight. The spark of ferocity in Hannibal turned to fire; a starving carnivore met with fresh meat, his teeth found their way to Will's neck. His fingers breached Will's hole, slipping into his pulsing warmth; Hannibal's mouth lay hovering above the trembling man's neck, waiting, spilling hot breath.

Will moved. He shook mountains from their foundations, knocked planets from their orbit, pulled Hannibal Lecter's steady hand into his burning, blurring core expertly. With permission to move granted, Hannibal let his mouth settle on the quivering Adam's apple below.

Will sang. Hannibal composed in thin air, filling the room with vibrations from Will's shaking, orchestral form. His body pressed, rose and fell. His lips wandered, opened and closed. Hannibal dared not bite down, only letting flushed skin beat against his tongue; he would tear only if Will permitted.

The cannibal watched as his love shook beneath his touch, eyes screwed shut and brows furrowed close. The ocean-wave rolls of his hips, his back, the smooth illumination of his scars against the warm ceiling light; all this took Hannibal to the edge of restraint. His body moved in response to Will's, chasing its heat, fingers delving deeper into the fire-bright darkness that was Will Graham.

Hannibal pressed his face back to its home in the curve of Will's neck as his dancing hand increased its pace. He could sing quietly, here, body swaying back and forth from the sheer momentum of his fingers; Hannibal spoke, breathless, "My good, cunning boy."

Will's parted lips managed a strangled noise, an echo of sound, "Good boy."

"Yes, good boy," Hannibal laughed, words aligning with repetitive thrusts and heated caresses of his hand, "Maybe not so cunning like this, hm?"

"Good," Will shook his head left and right, panting, "good- good boy," words cut short by gasps and cries.

The cannibal admired his love's pure dishevelment, bordering on beautiful debauchery. He punctuated each word of praise with a low growl into the hollow of Will's throat, "My good, vicious, wonderful boy."

If Will could have only gathered the water-slick stream of thoughts that slipped through his fingers, he would have called Hannibal out on his own lack of capacity for coherence mere minutes ago. Now, echoing back strings of praise, adorning all with dying gasps and living wails, swimming in the ever-increasing flow of heat and blood to his cock, Will's heart settled into a state of true peace; it hammered against the walls of his scarred chest, pushing, pumping, knowing.

Hannibal's breath fell sharp against Will's neck as he felt his fingers disappear into Will's hole, over and over again, returning to the surface to grace the quivering cock above with their smooth, violent presence. Will's rhythm, his shifting and shaking, became one with Hannibal's own disbelieving body; they moved as one, a blur of terrible beauty, of godhood and mortality, of belief and doubt, of pure, unbridled joy.

Hannibal lifted his head to meet Will's eyes, greeted instead with trembling lips and blind pupils.

"Will," Hannibal's pace slowed, spurring sounds of pleading confusion from Will as he turned to face his giver of love, of pain, of pleasure, "Will, look at me."

Hannibal increased his pace to something unholy at the sight that faced him.

Not a cogent thought made itself known in Will's eyes. A deep flush stained his cheeks wine-red, darker still on his parted breath-dry lips. Will's back arched and fell, cock pushing up towards Hannibal's exposed fingers, body rocking in a pattern of pure instinct. Each thrust drew forth one whimper after another, growing to a near-constant whine of pleasure interrupted by gasps of uneven breath. His movements grew hurried, frantic, eyes unseeing as they passed over Hannibal's adoring gaze, only to roll back in ecstasy as his muscles jerked in Hannibal's grasp.

"Beautiful."

Will came with a shout.

Chapter End Notes

wow guys look they finally fucked!!
our poor dear Hannibal almost slipped up and lost control! uh oh!! but it's okay Will brought him back to his normal pretentious, only slightly-uncontrollable self for now...

Pacem

Chapter Summary

"As a young man in Florence, I left my womanhood in the Galleria dell'Accademia, sitting in the shadow of Michelangelo's David. It has long since decayed into nothing but bone."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Will."

The unrelenting pounding of too-much-not-enough filled Will's head. His own name echoed through its trembling walls, Hannibal giving it voice; a chorus of chosen names, a self-made soliloquy. He noted the sweat that gathered between the bone of his eye socket and the veil of his eyelid, drawing attention away from his mind and to his all-too-damp skin.

"Follow my finger."

Wading through muffled words, stuttering pupils obediently latched onto the dark shape of Hannibal's index finger. They followed its form, their edges crinkling with a mimicking smile as Hannibal praised them.

"Good," then a cold, quiet pause, "I'll help you stand."

Will's mouth went to reject the offer, but could voice no complaint. He shook his head furiously; the movement came out subtle, much to Will's distress, the curls that stuck to his forehead barely shifting.

Hannibal saw the limitations of body and cries of a voiceless mind.

"You are in no place to walk, Will."

A whine tumbled from the other man's throat, fading against Hannibal's next words, "Your thoughts may be clear, but the physical effects of an altered state of mind can last several minutes to hours, if you allow them."

Will barely had time to consider the care in Hannibal's words, natural panic bubbling in his chest and escaping between his ribs, before yet another string of words wrapped itself around his throat-

"I can help you prolong this feeling if you so wish."

His feet hit the floor before Hannibal could finish his sentence. He didn't want this to last. There was a loneliness to it; his body felt heavy, and Hannibal's did not. He couldn't seem to speak, and Hannibal could. The wrongness of it, the sudden subversion of his weeks of care and work, came back to bite him as lust's haze cleared. He fought for autonomy over the bone-deep warmth of a well-worn body, placing weight onto toes now uncurled, watching as they gave way and slid him off the couch, towards the floor.

Wordlessly, Hannibal slipped an arm under Will's knees and behind his shoulders. The man tossed his head against the crook of Hannibal's neck, nose catching his bony clavicle, before turning away and thrusting his face back towards bone with the persistence of a mouse caught in the cat's claws.

"I will carry you for now. I'll be taking you to your bathroom and bathing you, if you find it acceptable?"

Hannibal need not ask- usually, he wouldn't- and Will knew; was this just a polite way to complete the sentence, or a genuine question? Regardless of its purpose, Will ceased his fruitless thrashing to respond. He nodded, allowing his heaving chest to carry it up and down in response.

"Good," Hannibal sighed, pausing and averting his eyes, "I may have to take a break in the process of carrying you. I still cannot bear all my weight, let alone yours, for long." Those words fell from proud lips- caverns barely concealing the sharp point of shame on his tongue.

This was less lonely, Will decided. He slowed his breath with a sigh, transferring its restlessness to his hands.

"It's okay."

Hannibal's expression turned placid, an unreadable stillness settling over his face as he carried Will to his bedroom. Will closed his eyes.

The pose was familiar. The jostle of his head against Hannibal's own was well-known; he had carried Hannibal like this himself, many times, over the last few weeks. To subvert such a stone-etched act was a bold move.

Will had almost begun to enjoy the rhythm of Hannibal's song-steady walking, when they paused; his head bounced against Hannibal's shoulder from the sudden stop. He looked up to see Hannibal wince against the bright-white light of his bathroom. The doctor placed Will down on the bathroom floor with a sharp breath in, Will's hip meeting cold tile and Hannibal propping himself up against the pale wall. Will watched his ribs expand and deflate with pain-laden breaths, watched his upper lip curl in a defeated snarl as their eyes met.

It was eerily similar to the night of the Dragon's defeat- Hannibal waiting to be defiled by Dolarhyde's hands and camera. Hannibal looking up at him with teeth bared and a hand pressed firm onto his wounded stomach. Hannibal laying exposed and in pain, painting, nearly helpless without Will's intervention. He was more beautiful now, though, laying against the wall with the physical shamelessness of sculpted marble; his only distress bloomed from his inability to give care.

Will tilted his head in attempted comfort, gentle hands easing pain, *"I said it's okay. You can't help needing to rest; all you can do is adapt. Evolve."*

"You need my help at the moment. One cannot become, let alone evolve, without first ensuring the survival of loved ones."

Will made to protest, but was interrupted by a full-body shiver that started his words off with trembling hands, *"Can't argue with that, Doctor Lecter."*

Self-satisfaction lay bare on Hannibal's fine features as he rose to kneel, functional alarmingly soon after nearly toppling over with Will in his arms. Even then, the dull ghost of disappointment came through in his words.

"I'm as much a layperson as you, now. Not even Apollo's divine hand could mend Hyacinthus's bleeding body in its time of need."

"Then take care of me as a lover," Will signed soft as Hannibal started the water, checking the temperature between glances. *"You can't be both god and mortal in the same body- Apollo's mistake was remaining divine next to his human love."*

Hannibal nodded, solemn, as if resigned to his earthly fate, "I will try my best to stay a man, then."

"Metaphorically, not literally?" A huff of breath close to laughter left Will's nose.

"Literally, as well," Hannibal smiled back, then turned to direct all his attention to preparing a bath suitable for his beloved. He dragged a finger through the water, creating ripples that drew Will's eyes to their dancing rings, then swirled; bubbles rose and clung to Hannibal's submerged finger.

Will watched the concentric circles die against the tub's edges, following the lines of their death to Hannibal, who had now backed away from the bath. He'd settled himself behind Will, kneeling with his heels digging into his backside- a position of servitude- that set Will's heart beating like the wings of caged doves against steel. He wished such a movement was something Hannibal did unconsciously; he wished Hannibal had given up just a bit of control over his body to let an unrestrained mind act, if only for a moment.

The position was very revealing, as well. All of Hannibal was presented to Will- the white-lined path of his chest, the faded dip of a scar just below his navel next to the once-gaping wound of the Dragon. Another, the dark pink dick that jutted out with pride, lay almost hidden between the fat of his thighs.

They had grown fuller, over months on the boat, free from needles piercing the flesh week by week. Will had noticed the thinning hair of his beard and the softening of his edges; Hannibal, be he god or man, could not secure hormones while in hiding. The changes crept up on them like the rising tide beating against stone- slow, peaceful violence against something immovable.

Will had become very aware of his own nakedness, in this moment.

It hadn't occurred to him that they'd traveled from the couch to the bathroom completely unclothed; the room grew colder at the realization. He placed a hand over his genitals, twitching with discomfort- the newly-born Adam given shame by God. He felt Hannibal's gaze burning into his face as he looked away, hoping the man would understand the wave of pain that had just washed over him.

Hannibal continued his talk of manhood and mortality- topics known and familiar that settled in Will's stomach like warm, live meat. He listened as the words formed in his mouth- the one that had held his neck in its jaws like a tamed dog fighting back the urge to maul- and he shivered.

"As a young man in Florence, I left my womanhood in the Galleria dell'Accademia, sitting in the shadow of Michelangelo's David. It has long since decayed into nothing but bone."

The shiver gave way to a sigh as his thoughts slowed. Hannibal's voice was steady, even when speaking of a life once-lived. Will's mind fell into a stream-trickle of distress, calmed by mutual understanding, yet still holding worry in its little palm like a child with a wilting flower.

"Do you think it can come back? Your womanhood?"

Hannibal paused, mouth opening and closing in silence. His hand drifted to his thigh as he spoke, its skin dimpling from the sheer force of his grip; Will prayed the movement was unconscious.

He took in a breath and continued, "I believe it can, yes. But not in any meaningful way." Hannibal released his thigh, leaving flushed red marks in his hand's wake. "Only its skeleton will be visible beneath my skin."

The pair was quiet save the hum of the bathroom lights, before Hannibal extended his arm to shut them off. It was dark, now, but not too dark; the lines of a cool-gray nightlight snaked along the shiny bathtub. Will breathed in, breathed out, let the darkness envelop him.

Hannibal shuffled over to Will on muscled arms, still kneeling, chest now pressed up against Will's back.

"See if you can crawl over the bath's edge. I will push you from behind, if you need."

Clouds of breath fell around his neck as Hannibal whispered; he leaned into the sensation, tipping his head back to nudge it against Hannibal's. Will could exist in this world, awake and aware, dim and warm and full of his beloved. He gave a low, grumbling agreement, and began the grueling task of crossing the line between air and water.

His hands first, then arms, wrapped around the tub's edge. He drew himself up, chest touching the chilled white porcelain, and pulled his body forward. A warning cry whistled past Will's teeth as he hissed at his ribs catching the edge.

Before he could drag himself any further, strong hands took hold of his hips. Their fingers rested in the valley between the crest of his pelvis and the soft cushion of his stomach, their

thumbs lying etched into his back like shining graphite on paper. They grabbed and held and lifted him up and over the edge like a cascading waterfall, body tumbling into rocks and salt.

Will fell into the tub with a relative grace, only propelling bubbles and water over the bath's porcelain wall. He cleared his damp-heavy lashes, wiping away their blur to reveal Hannibal, with hair clinging wet to his forehead from Will's violent descent. He shook his head, spraying hundreds of droplets onto Will's grinning face.

"I'm sorry," Hannibal muttered into the towel with haste, almost a brother to embarrassment, the words stretching with his lips as they brushed across the cloth.

"Don't be," Will spoke, loud at first, smile and voice fading a lowered head, "You don't know how much I miss that."

"You miss my apologies? I regret to say, but they are rare."

"My dogs," he pushed out, frustrated. "I miss my dogs. I'd be absolutely soaked whenever they'd shake dry."

Hannibal reached towards a soap they had saved from the boat, and made not a sound as he squeezed it onto his hand. Will lifted his nose at the smell- familiar. He watched as the opalescent liquid fell through Hannibal's fingers and into the water; a gentle splash made it bubble with shimmering, shifting color.

He didn't expect the man to respond- more accurately, he preferred if Hannibal refrained from it. Will could fill the silence coming from Hannibal's mouth with regret and uncertainty, rather than the surety of remorselessness.

Will let Hannibal go- let run his hands over his body. He let Hannibal coat him in water and soap, let him put it on and wash it off over and over again. To be on the receiving end once more- to feel the firm yet caring grasp of Hannibal's hands, a doctor's hands, a lover's hands- felt like a warm and welcoming drowning. Where his emergence from the sea brought with it Hannibal's life in its arms, his submergence into simple bathwater brought his own life back into its rightful body.

It was a relief, to allow the doctor to see him in such complex simplicity; Hannibal could pry him open as he once had in that now-forlorn Baltimore office. He could thrust his hands beneath his ribcage and pull out his heart, for all he cared; Hannibal would do it with mastery and love.

"Hannibal."

"Yes, Will."

"Press harder when you wash my hair."

Some things take time being mastered, though; Hannibal had not bathed Will day after day for months, learning where he went warm and pliant, still and tense. Hannibal's knowledge of

Will's mind was unrivaled- his body was another matter. While the average man could always guess, Will was not so predictable, and Hannibal not so average.

Almost on command, fingers dug into his scalp with a force that seemed to encircle his entire brain. Will let out a moan subdued by nothing, bringing a small puff of happiness from Hannibal's chest to his mouth in a smile.

"That's good," Will sighed, melting into the touch.

Hannibal hummed in return. The sound echoed through the secluded bubble that had formed around them, iridescent and stronger than the very air they shared. Its walls would not break against the weight of the world outside the bath for two.

~

Will fiddled with the bandage on his finger, courtesy of Hannibal; yesterday's knife wound proved painful today soaked in water, and the doctor had insisted on treating it properly. He could barely see its edges in the dark, instead knowing its presence from the pull of adhesive on skin. Hannibal was farther away now, putting on his nightclothes. He stood across Will's room with a towel thrown across the bed, taking great care not to lose the delicate balance perched on freshly-healed bones. It was almost pitiful, how much Will wished to help the man, but Hannibal's insistence on self-sufficiency with a beloved in need took precedence.

Instead, Will snapped his fingers, bandage shifting with the sound- an indirect call to attention. Hannibal steadied himself with a hand on the bed, back turned to the other.

"Come sit down," Will beckoned to the back of Hannibal's head, patting the mattress.

Hannibal turned automatically, leaning onto the bed just enough to settle; the motion was smooth and practiced, as if it had been a lifelong habit, a daily devotional.

Hannibal paused. Will could see the moment of realization; the other's body had acted without thought. Every word and touch was planned to no end- not this. It had happened in the midst of passion, Will remembered, Hannibal swallowing his pulse with heartstopping fever. The open bedroom was not so controlled a space; Will preyed on the man's softness of thought.

"Sit."

No longer caught unawares- much to Will's disappointment- Hannibal gave the warning of bared teeth before the bite, "Let me dry your hair, first. It will end up unflattering in the morning, otherwise."

"Just stay," Will growled, then allowed softness to seep into his voice's edges, "Please."

"As you wish."

Hannibal stood turned away from Will again, perching on the bed and reaching his arms back. He worked to pull his body up and drag himself down towards the empty pillow beside

Will, teasing a creak and a moan from the bedframe. Hannibal then proceeded to grab the towel and bring it towards Will's head, fluffing his curls with a bouncing hand.

He yelped with surprise, shaking the towel off and giving Hannibal a cold glare; the cannibal only smiled, letting the tip of a barely human fang show. Will reached towards him, fingers searching for the towel and the hand attached to it, just as Hannibal pulled away.

"I'll be back in a minute," his tongue rushed out as his body followed suit, dissolving into the dark bathroom nearby.

Another betrayal.

He sighed, head falling onto the pillow beneath him with a dull thump. He'd spent the entire day being alone, rewarded by a flood of care and affection. When Hannibal had become conscious after the fall, he'd been given the chance to touch him, to love him- just as Hannibal had done unto him today. Was he thanking Will for his care? Or were his hands only fumbling to regain his grip on Will's dependence? On his own independence?

The heels of Will's palms rose to his eyes, pressing until bursts of blue stars filled the screen of his mind. He would enjoy this moment, whatever the motivation behind it; he'd ponder its meaning in the morning.

He unveiled his vision just as Hannibal returned- barely enough time to form words of philosophy to speak.

"Stay."

The silent response of homelessness without the other sat dense in the air. Hannibal only fell heavy onto the bed and pulled the covers over his well-used legs. He shifted to his side, half of his face resting against the pillow; Will glanced at him out of his periphery, unsure if Janus had merged into one or if the god truly did contain multitudes.

He heard Hannibal's breath, the way its ragged edges faded with an inhale, falling soft on the exhale. Will interrupted its smoothness, air stuttering in his throat as he pushed it out, "What do you think of me when I can't talk?"

"The same thing you think of me. There is a psychological explanation for your symptoms that I will never judge or look down upon; I appreciate the same sentiment in return," Hannibal replied instantly, lips tense, face expressionless.

"You know what it's like."

A pause this time, before he continued in monotone, "I was mute for years after the death of my sister. It returns in times of great stress."

Rudeness sat on the surface of Will's tongue- on the greatest flesh-tool of man that pokes and prods at the surrounding teeth, "What do Mischa and falling off a cliff have in common?"

Hannibal's breath hitched at the name once buried in snow. His speech was littered with pauses- for recovery, the other assumed.

"Love. Death. They are great hinges on which all human sympathies turn."

Will's eyes stuck to the ceiling, motionless in their contemplation. They remained there, still and shining as his mouth opened with truth, "You can't deal with an average amount of both. You're either obsessive or indifferent- never something in the middle."

"So I have observed."

"When the world dies down, you crawl inside yourself. Except for when you feel free to do as you wish."

"And you the opposite. Too much life, too much love, and you lose the capacity to communicate." Hannibal spoke as if protecting his psychological reality. The hallmark observation and objective information were still there, but wrapped in the blanket of defensiveness; he was bringing Will to the same level of humiliation as himself.

"We are- identically different," Will soothed, hoping his intentions made it across the sea of what is too alike to be spoken.

They lay still. Hannibal barely blinked.

Will turned to check if he were even breathing, for he could not hear it.

Just as his cheek met the pillow, the other's lips parted, speaking, "I could not communicate efficiently on the plane to Paris, after I forgave you. All I could say were snippets of polite French, taken from my childhood. It was a fascinating psychological phenomenon."

This, too, was coated in distance. Will could not stand it- this denial of vulnerability. Something so small, so frail, was escaping from Hannibal's throat, and he was drowning it in choked-back tears. Will went forth with a new, albeit similar, topic to tease the pitiful thing out of its ribcage-prison. He would voice his own vulnerability, if Hannibal could not.

"I don't remember much of what happened on that couch."

"An equally fascinating occurrence," Hannibal stated, continuing after a pause as Will waited with wide, expectant eyes, "You will remember. You can recall your location, and likely remembered the time and your name in those moments. You were oriented and aware; only your consciousness was altered."

"That isn't a good thing, in my experience. You saw to that," Will scoffed. He turned towards Hannibal fully, ribs closing in on each other as he lay on his side.

"It is a very good thing, Will," he reassured as he lifted his head and rested it atop the padded surface of his forearm. He continued, wriggling occasionally as he settled into the position, "In fact, it shows you can fully immerse yourself in any role you choose, much like with your gift of hyperempathy."

Will frowned, almost a mockery of the fear he had once felt from those words, and sent his eyes straight to Hannibal's, "And in the roles I don't choose."

"You will never be fully vulnerable and incapable of protecting yourself in dangerous situations; your mind will not let you float away. The unconscious mind is different in that sense- isolated from your empathy and focused solely on the physical body. "

He was more secure in his ability to protect himself, now more than ever, but doubt still lay tied to his mind like a lark's head. Will hadn't felt so strong a disconnect between himself and his mind in years; this experience, while more controlled, struck a long-neglected chord. He let his concerns be known, sending out a quiet, almost shamefully-asked question, "How can I trust what I can't confirm myself?"

"Do you remember when I asked if you wanted me to wound you?"

Will only pushed his head deeper into the pillow in silence, attempting to quell the distraught knot that was forming in his intestines.

"I could smell your fear, thick and sweet on the back of my tongue. Your hands became claws and your body that of a startled horse, uncontrollable and strong without concern for the safety of others."

He stared straight through the cannibal's animal-black pupils, whispering out with near-embarrassment, "I don't remember that."

Hannibal continued with smoothness to his tone, "I then proceeded to close your eyes and apply gentle pressure to your chest."

That, he remembered; Will gave a sound of confirmation.

"You're saying I wouldn't let myself be hurt, even if I wasn't aware of it."

"Yes. After I escaped from the Verger Estate with you in my arms, I had to bathe and clothe you. You won't remember that, as the anesthetic that poor excuse for a surgeon gave rendered you fully unconscious. But it serves as an appropriate example of the difference between a partially-conscious and unconscious awareness."

Will's body relaxed infinitesimally. Hannibal had treated him well, kindly, even, in a state of complete vulnerability; love can catalyze a change of heart, even for the seemingly monstrous.

Will blushed- a rarity- the pink tinge invisible in the dark bedroom. Its heat was undeniable. He let it spread throughout his body, warm in the absence of Hannibal's heat as he continued to ease Will's fears.

The man continued to speak about the psychology behind his experience; Will allowed the nuances of his words to fall away, blurring into a deep rumble.

"Also consider the unlikely occasion I would try to kill you; your body will fight it. You may even kill me in return, if your unconscious mind willed it so."

The sharpness of kill's consonant on Hannibal's tongue, its coldness in meaning, brought Will back to attention. Without a second of hesitation, he confessed, "I don't want to kill you."

"Neither do I," Hannibal preached symmetrically, singing the truth both gods could agree on. He closed his eyes, if only to provide Will with a barrier before the flood of words, "But I will want to devour you until the day I die."

Unfazed, Will uttered a simple phrase- "I know."

He looked up to meet Hannibal's eyes brimming with tears, saltwater that had collected over minutes exchanging words. The man lifted an arm over Will's shoulder, tempting him closer; he accepted the offer. Will slid towards the foot of the bed slightly, just enough to bury his face into the sweat-sweet plush of Hannibal's chest. He dragged the dusting of silver hair across his own stubble for soothing friction- rough, yet soft and familiar. Hannibal's hand snaked its way up his back and to his hair, curling. It found its rightful place in the smooth night-brown, fingerjoints bent like faithful knees against dark velveteen pews.

Four hands, all in different places- one stroking Will's hair, another curled into a fist against Hannibal's chest, two more resting by twin pulses beating hot and steady. Hannibal's palm lay between his cheek and the pillow, placed as it was on the night of giving and taking rare gifts. Tonight, it inhabited the opposite side of his face; the arm that once brandished a knife now wrapped behind his ear and stroked, back and forth, back and forth.

As Will fell calm, he sent out threads of half-coherent conversation to Hannibal, whom he assumed would still be awake; he would take care of Will, he knew- at least emotionally.

"Y'should be muzzled for your own good. Won't ever eat me that way."

Hannibal chuckled, the sound rich and full, flowing through his chest into Will's bones as he spoke, "Consider, I already was- for the safety of myself and others. But you are no better, dear Will."

"I know," he sighed, hand sliding heavy from Hannibal's neck to his waist. He pulled the man near, pressing up against his chest closer, tighter. His head rose as the man inhaled, lungs bursting with air; it fell when he exhaled, the slope wilting like a flower.

And so they waded into the rippling waters of sleep- hands tangled between hair and soft skin, breath even and slow. The deep dark of it all washed over them in waves, interrupted only by a single gasp.

"Oh," Will lifted his head from Hannibal's chest, looking for the other's eyes in the dark with tired-blurry vision. He caught their curious, still-awake glimmer, and propped himself up on his elbows.

"We don't have 'nough food."

"Leave such worries to me, my beloved."

Hannibal rested his hand atop Will's back, pushing him down as the younger wrestled free to protest, "No-" another shake of the head, "store. Local."

Hannibal nodded in understanding, bringing an old verse of song to the surface, "To market, to market, to buy a fat pig."

His hand still lay on the center of the arching spine, pulling it down with ever-increasing weight. Will's elbows buckled beneath the incessant pressure freely, and his face fell flush to Hannibal's chest once more. The man settled as he had before, running his beard against Hannibal's chest for the sheer pleasure of it, yawning in echo, "To market, tomorrow."

Hannibal smiled- something that had become more frequent- before giving the final words of the night, "Let us discuss the details in the morning."

Will didn't respond. His arm only grew tighter around Hannibal's waist, loosening when their pulses joined in noticeable, slow rhythm, constant through the night.

~

The bed was cold.

Will shook from the loss of kindred warmth, waking from the violence of it. Any discomfort was eased when he sensed Hannibal across the room, giving off a soft scratching near the foot of his bed. Instinct to find its source did not rear its head; Will only turned his own towards a faint light, squeezing his already-closed eyes tighter still against its glare. He only managed to open them when he heard a snuffle.

Hannibal sat hunched over the gray desk across the room, pencil etching its contents into cotton-rag paper in small, tight circles. His pencil stopped when he lifted his head, attending to the rustling of Will's awakening.

"Good morning, *mio bel cerbiatto*."

Will grunted as he brushed the covers aside. He didn't make to sit up just yet- he only lifted his head a few inches to survey the territory of his material body.

Dull, dry-blood red caught his eye; thankfully, no wounds bore their telltale heartbeat-sting. Instead, a collage of finger-shaped bruises and red-dotted circles danced along his hips. Some lay across his stomach, some on his thigh; Will could almost feel the blood ready to burst from the mark on his neck, like a great water-beast waiting to strike below the surface.

There was a weight to them. While they were not tender to the touch, their tenderness in emotion sat upon him in heavy, purpled piles of past love.

Will propped a leg up on the bed to study the sucking bruise settling on the pale, vein-marbled flesh of his thigh. His knee blocked out Hannibal's head enough for him to focus on the mark; to compensate for the visual barrier, Will kept their conversation flowing.

"Good morning. Don't call me that," he requested, voice devoid of meaningful tone, lifting a hand to trace the bruise's multicolored edges. He trembled, though not by his own hand; the echo memory of Hannibal's lips tearing at his seams ran from the mark straight to his heart.

Hannibal either didn't notice, or pretended not to notice his beloved's morning exploration. It was something intimate and private- something done alone before a mirror, and not before the eyes of another. Will regarded Hannibal as a mirror, though with skin and sweat reflective over glass.

"Don't be so quick to judge before you understand, dearest Will. It means 'my beautiful fawn'."

"Fawn? Not a stag?" he sneered.

"It is simply the proper term of endearment."

Will let his feet fall to the carpeted floor with a soft thud. His arms reached out towards the sky, grasping air in praise of nothing but life itself; he stretched. He allowed his body a yawn, testing his mouth's ability to form words, deciding to wait until it closed and fell under his brain's control once more.

"I didn't pin you as a man so rooted in tradition."

"I am never entirely predictable; I am so near you in predictability I cannot tell where I end and you begin. Then again, I am a longtime believer in blood-and-thunder romance; I prefer to gift a single calla lily over a bouquet of roses."

Will felt eyes on him as he walked over to his dresser, right next to the desk where Hannibal had claimed studio space.

"Or a heart-shaped human over a paper valentine." He fished through an open drawer for clothing, furrowing his brow and gritting his teeth as he searched for a specific pair of navy socks. "And for all that unconventionality," he released his jaw, socks hanging proud in his hand, "you collar me with a pet name."

Hannibal finally turned to him, smile threatening to slip past the cannibal's teeth, "Would you prefer 'baby' or 'gorgeous'?"

Will's lips parted with distaste, scrunching up his nose, "I'd endure being called your revelatory lamb over any one of those." He gathered all necessary clothing for the day and fell silent, getting to work slipping on each sock and pant leg in order- left, right, left, right.

Hannibal returned to his position, head hovering over the marked paper as he purred with darkening sweetness, "Of course, *mio agnello*."

He froze. It was harmless play- they both knew- but Will could not deny the rush of predatory cold that settled in his stomach, the flow of hot blood to his face and fingertips. He let the feeling wash over him- let it be known in his voice and his skin and the scent that poured from his holy-water sweat. He breathed.

"Should I show you mercy before I slit your throat?"

Hannibal's pencil stopped scratching- "It would pain me for you to have a shred of mercy for me. Be merciless,"- started tearing. "But you will never hear me utter that beautiful name

again."

"*Mio mostro*," Will growled, the words fluid and tangled between teeth and tongue.

"*Mio cervo scuro*," Hannibal sang in return. "But that is to be discussed another time."

They yielded to the other's nips and scratches. Will buttoned his flannel sans a single loop; Hannibal lined up his pencils according to grade. This was mere play-fighting compared to the bone they had broken before, and yet- the threat of death hung low in the skies above them, a blood moon amidst sparkling constellations.

Hannibal pushed his chair out to stand. Will hadn't noticed he had already dressed in a button-up and waistcoat, ever-prepared. It gave a faint shimmer in the morning sunlight, a wine-dark maroon; subtle, compared to others of sky blue or bloody plaid. His hand fell to a pencil, adjusting its position in line as he posed a tentative question, "Does 'beloved' suit your tastes for now?"

"Beloved," Will affirmed.

The man looked around for a second, then took a large step out the bedroom door.

Will listened as his footsteps turned to the kitchen, fading only slightly with the distance. He stepped up to the abandoned desk to admire the work sitting before him.

All was blurred out of complete focus on the paper except the form of two figures, bright negative space in a sea of dark value. Will could make out a chair on the side, overturned in chaos. The floor was in a similar state- carpeted, with the fabric standing at attention in violent folds and bends. On the ornately-detailed carpet lay a staff, sharply thrown aside before the two figures. Will could not make out the pose; its lines were too faint, its figures too intertwined to tell. All he could make out were the faint outlines of sharp cheekbones on one, and the delicate fall of Renaissance-bright curls on the other, cut open by a tear in the paper.

Chapter End Notes

i have returned :)

thank you for the lovely comments, they mean so much and it is amazing that people are moved by my writing!! classwork is a bitch right now but this fic is my pride and joy, so I will continue to update it until it comes to its proper end.

Coda

Chapter Summary

Hannibal ran.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: brief mention of rape, and descriptions of transphobic behavior and language are used :(if those are triggering, I will leave a brief summary in the end notes so you can skip the chapter with basic info about what happened.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Standing atop the bluff, Hannibal admired the sea's beauty for the first time since it caught him in its loving, icy arms. The blue-green shimmer of it, muddied by man, shone through all else; it illuminated the bellies of the gulls that flew overhead, and turned the nearby cliffs brittle with crashing embraces. So much of its violence was familiar, and yet there was peace to it, from a distance. It did not toss him back and forth, it was not merciless; the ocean proved to be a thing of beauty.

While he could escape its thunderous cries, Hannibal could not escape the sea wind that came with the tide. He swore he felt the cool, salty spray ride the currents of air, even from such a high point. He turned to Will, seated behind him at the city-square fountain's edge.

"It is a wonder to see Zephyrus carry his breath from the sea to such great heights," Hannibal mused as he sat beside Will, carding a hand through his hair to fix its floating, wind-tousled strands. Will's, ever-lengthening, danced and twirled with the breeze, as if built for such motion; Hannibal fought back the urge to bury his nose into the sweet forest, turning his face towards the sea once more. "Let us pray Chloris keeps her lover in check."

Both men were beside each other, bodies perpendicular to the sea, profiles parallel to one another- Will, deep in thought, brow furrowed, and Hannibal, caught in talk of love, loose.

"Zephyr transformed the humble nymph into a god like himself. That is the purest form of love; elevation of the other."

Will sat completely still, only his halo of hair floating and mouth moving, stiff-lipped, "You forgot to mention that Chloris was raped."

"I do not forget, only omit. A propensity towards rape is the great shame of the ancient gods; while there is beauty in eroticism, the only beautiful elements of rape are the deconstructed letters of its name," Hannibal professed, searing the edges of his words with righteous hellfire. He shifted his gaze ever-higher, as if speaking to the gods themselves of their sins.

"You had a painting in your dining room. Leda and the Swan."

A challenge- ever-so-characteristic of Will; Hannibal found himself amused. "Boucher's interpretation, yes. What of it?"

"Leda, raped by Zeus in disguise. Why idolize it?"

Would Will be so unperceptive as to misinterpret his intentional placement of the work in his house? Hannibal entertained the question, clarifying, "My dining room was where the act of eating- sometimes, of butchering- took place; not idolization. Only what comes of it is something to marvel at."

It seemed something just between a genuine question and interrogation, with Will occasionally glancing at him in the silence after his words faded from the air. He continued, "Consuming is an indulgence for those who appreciate it, but is not something truly beautiful. It is savage in nature, as the hunter bloodies and mauls its prey just for the rush of it. It is a blurring of the boundary between man and beast, unspeakably ugly, and is suitable only for my dining room."

Will smirked, then paused, as if catching himself. He seemed to straighten and rearrange his thoughts into a veil, covering up his little outburst, "Your displays- tableaux- are different. They elevate instead of humiliate- canonize instead of consume. They speak what the pigs could only squeal; something above instinct."

Will understood. Hannibal did not care for concealing his emotions, but effort was necessary for him to keep from bursting into blood-red ocean spray of adoration. He looked into the man's eyes with as much reverence, as much appreciation as he could bring to the surface, praying it traveled to Will in miracle. He wanted to sing, to dance, to make music and art and poetry that sang more than his mouth could ever move. Will, the eternal muse, saw all with barely an explanation, and Hannibal could only watch in awe as his mind worked. He would carry the sun across the sky, if only to see Will rise from death every morning.

All Hannibal could do was nod.

"Only the painting, the myth and skill of it- not Leda and Zeus themselves- are beautiful. The result of their copulation was Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman to walk the Earth, and yet all this is never shown in the piece; the fact that humanity has turned such a vile act into art is a thing of beauty, as well. We can transform the things around us; we can even transform ourselves," he breathed in, stealing air back from his sentiment, "and that is beautiful."

"And so you keep your prized possessions in the bedroom."

Hannibal tilted his head, looking for double meaning behind the words, but could see none on Will's face.

"So I do. I've grown quite fond of the tapestry above my bed," he admitted.

Will smiled, something knowing behind his lips. Hannibal observed as Will kept watch over the ocean, eyes catching on the glimmers and sparks that flew from breaking waves. So much about Will moved- his hands, eyes, hair and mind all danced in a heated craze that was barely concealed, oftentimes released, from beneath the thin veil of translucent skin. The frenzy of thrashing, spasming motion caught Hannibal in its claws, grabbing him by the shoulders and shaking him with its mindless euphoria.

Hannibal startled as Will stood up. He only let his lashes fall in a flinch as Will leaned forward, extending a hand in offering.

"Let's go hunt something down."

He stared at the open palm for a second, hovering like a cautious bird feeding from the hand of a child, believing it a monster.

Will turned his head away to look at a group of people gathering at a faraway market vendor. His hand still sat tethered to the same spot in space, opening and closing its fingers in mock grabbing, calling Hannibal forth. The movement was accompanied by a short, encouraging, "c'mon," blue eyes giving an expectant glance from behind the shoulder.

Hannibal rushed forward when blue eyes met maroon brown, hands colliding and fingers intertwining. Will grasped the force of nature sitting in his palm, squeezing; Hannibal squeezed back. The cannibal stepped forward to lead, with dear Will as its company for the hunt.

Streetside homes and buildings pulled dark curtains before open vistas, obscuring all but slivers of shimmering blue as the pair entered a living, bustling part of town. The noise of water fell away into a disorganized chorus of voices, all begging- begging for food, for water, for priceless objects and handcrafted keepsakes. So much life fluttered about the market that Hannibal could taste it, savory and rich and *fresh* between his teeth.

Hannibal caught a stream of blurred motion out the corner of his eye, sparing a glimpse, only to be met by beauty incarnate.

Will's sight flickered with light, jumping from person to person, building to building, collecting any and all information possible. Hannibal considered the possibility of Will being overwhelmed, but quite the opposite seemed true; he was in his element, taking in each minute detail of the environment with a ferocity bestowed by the gods only to one man on earth.

While captivated by the potential of it all, Hannibal remained the forward eyes and ears of the pair. He took it upon himself to take them to their destination- a fine music shop- safely, with no unnecessarily rude encounters. Each step was calculated to avoid catching a pig's handbag or a sheep's coat, dodging potential witnesses with dull eyes and minds attuned to danger.

One thing Hannibal could not deny of his nature was fear; it built around Will, his safety, his happiness, his authenticity- all of Will. While he was still concerned with self-preservation, much of his need to protect himself had taken Will into its all-consuming maw. Even now, hands held tight, he and Will functioned as a single fear-fueled unit; Hannibal acted, Will observed. The beasts that wandered beneath his feet held so much fear in their minds that it clouded all reason; Hannibal could not see himself in such distasteful a position. It was strange, to be so unaware of himself, as his awareness of love's intensity was no secret. But what is fear, if not love to an extreme? The heart beats just as fast on the brink of orgasm as it does in panic; the climax of life is a "little death." Hannibal refrained from confessing so soon such a craving for Will, or even himself, to meet so beautiful a fate.

He had to admit to himself that fear moved his feet forward, and drew Will's darkening expression to onlookers with gazes too curious and mouths too open. In the same way, it was love that drew him back to allow Will his proper reign, and worked to disrupt his breath's steadiness in the other's presence. So different a thing, yet so similar, was fear from love, that the two were barely distinguishable.

Will had ceased his inspection of the area, turning to Hannibal with a slightly less wary eye, "We wouldn't've lasted to lunch if we hadn't come here."

Hannibal nodded, chest puffing out with pride as he added, "Yesterday you suggested we go out for groceries; I took it upon myself to locate a suitable farmer's market this morning- an expected consequence. There are also many shops for basic supplies and furniture nearby."

"Furniture?"

"I am in need of a harpsichord, if we are to reside here permanently."

Will laughed, round and full, giving him a look of near disbelief. It wasn't mockery- not exactly- but a sort of expectation; Will knew him well. The man caught his breath, calming the spasm of laughter with a smile, "We can also get anything else we need around the house, yeah? Shampoo. Pain medication."

The doctor raised an eyebrow. "It will be over-the-counter, I assume?". As Will confirmed it with whispered 'yes', Hannibal shook his head, exaggerating his disappointment with a sigh, "Truly a shame. I will not settle for poor-quality medical supplies."

"We'll see. Be grateful you can even find a harpsichord around here."

Will returned to his post as a guard, keeping watch once more.

They walked in silence a while longer, Will pulling them aside to look at the occasional whiskey vendor, Hannibal at wine and cheese tasting; none to drink, but to take back to their shelter. There was a simplicity to the act- one Hannibal had neglected to cultivate in his own, once-solitary life. It was different from his confinement in the white-walled institution, as well; there was now a place to return to- warm, whole, hand in hand with another who felt just the same.

Hannibal had broken his habit of storing food long ago- remnants of a soul buried in powdered snow. It had threatened to return while on the ocean with Will, though food preparation had been out of his hands, back then. He allowed Will to gather fresh cuts of beef and pork from the vendors, only interfering to offer his opinion about size or location. Hannibal remained unwavering in observation, though, watching Will closely; he could give up choice, but he would not give up anything greater when it came to food.

Hannibal was looking away while Will stuffed a stalk of celery into a plastic bag, turning to look just as the synthetic material gave a great rustle. Its contents shifted as paper-wrapped meat slid against glass-encased wine to accompany the great green mass Will was forcing beside them. Hannibal offered to carry the bag; Will acquiesced with a grunt. They continued walking, Hannibal occasionally glancing to the side to watch as the man gathered more food in the cradle of his elbow. The harvest piled high until it spilled out, falling from his body like bounty from a cornucopia. Hannibal only paused to catch the falling items, gently placing them into the bag at his side; if not for his efforts, Will would have been leaving a trail of fruits and curios behind for all to follow.

Hellish grating struck Hannibal's ears as they turned a corner. The sound was the voiceless song of a lone violinist, busking- or performing- before a music store; Hannibal could not tell which. He had heard it a few buildings back, but had not assumed it belonged to a being so knowledgeable in the arts- a pleasant surprise. The tune mimicked that of an old folk song, leaping and catching double stops in midair. Though distorted through the crowd's noise and an inexperienced hand, the young woman had spirit. She seemed on fire with the sound of her wooden twin, head bobbing and rising with each slow, ringing, trilling note; Hannibal could acknowledge the beauty in her movement, at least.

He passed by the violinist and made to step into the music store behind her, but found himself rooted to the spot by the arm of his other. Will kept his hand wrapped tightly around Hannibal's; it had become tinted gray from smudged pencil marks.

Will stood motionless before the musician, except for his head- his mind. He moved with her, neck smoothly following her lead from one side to another, with the grace of a performer under a director. His lips sang a few mumbled words that aligned to the rhythm. While it was daytime, the sun drenched the area in shadow, offering it the cool peace of night. Will seemed to act as if beneath night's private cloak; his words sat perched on a crescent-moon smile beneath star-dotted eyes. He gave Hannibal a warning glance before reaching into his pocket and pulling out a banknote.

Hannibal watched in amusement as his beloved passed the paper note between his fingers, waiting for the musician to finish. He did not budge, but his head moved, continuing its lovely, slow swaying, stopping only as the final notes rang throughout the square.

The violinist bowed; Will took his chance to slip the note into the newscap lain before her. Before she could even rise to acknowledge him, Will took Hannibal's arm at the elbow and dragged them both into the music store, doorbell ringing cathedral-loud to announce their arrival.

A short, bearded man stood at the counter, making eye contact with Hannibal. He nodded; Hannibal nodded back, a courteous thing, quickening his pace to allow Will to fall behind

him. They quickly disappeared past countless small aisles filled to the brim with violins, small woodwinds and accessories, to the back of the store. Several larger instruments stood there, grand in their size- harpsichords, pianofortes and keyboards, lids all propped open like mouths, vocalizing in silent unison.

As he perused the selection of claviers, the violinist continued her poor- albeit passionate- playing. The wonderful specimens of song did not distract from the image burned into Hannibal's mind; he saw Will's lips moving to foreign music, their parting known, soft and easy, as in a chaste kiss. It was not jealousy that bled from Hannibal's body, but rabid curiosity; what hid behind the dissolving veil of Will Graham that he was unaware of? What else was there left for him to gnaw on besides bone?

He cleared his throat before breaking the silence of the store, pulling Will's attention to him, "Did you know the song the performer was playing?"

Will smiled. "Yes. My dad used to play it, sometimes," His voice trailed off, eyes falling to the side, pulling memories from the halls and side altars of his mind. "He wasn't very good, but I remember it. I'd sing while he played."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow in surprise. "I assumed you could play the piano, at least, considering you once owned one in Wolf Trap. It was horribly out of tune," he looked to Will, who was running a hand over a piano lid, as he continued, "but you never admitted to me you could sing."

"Never had the chance. The two of us were too occupied with... beauty of another caliber." Will finished the sentence with a sharpness, not allowing the final syllable to round out the introductory consonant- harsh, on purpose.

Hannibal thought Will's words over for a second. His potential for art lay smothered beneath bodies of flowers and blood, unlike Hannibal's; he was not yet in a position to recreate the brushwork of late masters in any medium besides flesh and bone. He would have to pull Will's skills to the surface, but first- give him the emotional room to consider the idea.

His thought showed through an audible pause, leaving Will hanging on to his next words like a hand to the cliff's ledge, "I regret not allowing you space to express your artistic talent."

Will cocked his head, fingers slipping and releasing the eroding stone. "You regret?"

"One of many. As you once said, I am now 'riddled with regrets,' and all for you, dear Will."

He watched as Will teased a white key, pushing and pulling it just over the ledge of resonance; soft enough so it does not cry, but hard enough for it to shed a single tear, helpless. It faded away into more speech, quiet as a reverberating ghost of a note, "I've lost some of my regrets. All for you."

Hannibal placed a hand beside Will's, mimicking his behavior; soft, slow, hard, fast- ghosts built upon ghosts of music to create a silent symphony. He whispered, "It seems we blur again, my beloved."

"So we do."

Will stepped aside, abandoning and releasing the keys for Hannibal to press. The cannibal gave a quick "*thank you*" as he sat down, passing the bag of groceries to Will and letting his finger fall to the glistening ivories. A single note- F-sharp. Another repeated note, and the piece began in full.

Hannibal's bones were formed around the notes of the Bach Goldberg Variations; this was a fact. They had served him well in times of great change- his own becoming, Will's self-realizing birth, and their eventual resurrection. Both hands wandered the keyboard, their pale undersides blending with the bone-white keys when he lifted a finger, leaping from chord to chord. Both the melody and harmony seemed a simple thing, sweet, then sour, then sweet again- variation after variation, mastery of the musical staff all musicians bowed down to. Hannibal channeled this knowledge of each gap and line through the wires of his nerves to the organic machine-joints of his fingers, leaving space only for the composer to voice his intention.

As the variations' tones rose and fell, it occurred to him that Will had never heard him play; it seemed Will was not the only one to neglect showing the other his love of art for the ear. He would ask Will to sing for a piece of his, one day, though not on the pianoforte; the harpsichord, full in its sound and gentle to the touch, would suit his yet-to-be-heard voice wonderfully. Hannibal could hear its softness against the harpsichord's beautifully harsh strings, the tongue-trapped voice maroon in color, velveteen to the touch. Unnervingly different from Will's speaking voice, his song would be greater than that of Orpheus, bound not even by love.

Hannibal had reached the slightly-dissonant sixth variation, when he noticed the shop's wood-rot scent had grown potent. He glanced to the side between rests, only able to make out a large lump of a shape standing far behind Will- the shopkeeper.

The man was not unbearably close to them, but had disturbed Hannibal's performance with his mere presence. He carried on, only mildly annoyed; Will turned, sensing a change in the music, knowing it to be outside the realm of their two-being world. He stared at the man for a moment, then left to speak to him.

A twinge of disappointment rang through Hannibal's chest as Will walked away. Muffled voices overlaid his music, and the audience, once made of only one love, had become two; worse yet, it had now disappeared entirely. He finished the variation without flair, swept a hand over the piano bench, and went to join his love in conversation.

He wrapped an arm around Will's waist before fully assessing the situation, planting tentative lips to his neck.

"Who has captured your interest?" he hummed, close enough for the words to register as a simple kiss to all around them.

Will did not reply. There was a terrifying stillness to him as his eyes slogged through mud-thick air, stopping at the man before them.

The piano was more so a memory than something bright and alive. Even the sparkling high notes had a dusty quality to them, compared to his beloved harpsichord; this became relevant as Hannibal looked over the store owner's facial features. His nose dipped and rose, his lips fell with disbelief, like that of an old acquaintance. Such a familiar face could not be summoned by the clavier that plucked the strings of his soul, but by the piano- a being of memory.

"Hanne," the man uttered, such a natural sound coming from his mouth, echoing off the store walls and distorting into something unrecognizable- foreign.

When one dreams, each seems hours, if not eons, long; in reality, each only takes mere minutes, seconds. Hannibal only tensed for a moment, but the strength of it could stretch millennia. He fought back the urge to usher Will away and explain, hoping the sentiment would carry through the trembling particles of breath between them. No lover of his from Florence had made it out alive; mere fascinated acquaintances were another matter.

Hannibal had fallen still with Will. He could only listen as the harmless assailant spoke.

"My dear, how wonderful it is to see you! You have-" the man looked Hannibal up and down, taking in what could not be denied, "You have changed quite a bit. How have you been?"

His accent was thick- familiar, like once-golden syrup turned sour. Hannibal saw Will's nose twitch with distaste; it seemed he had taken an immediate dislike towards the sound. Such a lovely reaction encouraged Hannibal to continue, working to end the conversation as swiftly and calmly as possible.

"Sir, I believe you've confused me with someone else. Would you like me to direct you back to the clerk counter?" He pressed a hand to the man's back, gently guiding him in the direction he had come from. In return, his attempt was swatted away with a loud slap.

"Do not make a fool of me. Your faces are exactly alike."

Hannibal cradled his reddening hand close to his chest, clasping long fingers over it to hide the sting. Blood flowed to the new mark on his hand, stirring long-buried memories from their beds with a flood. The pain was jarringly familiar; Hannibal recalled long candlelit nights spent sketching, studying all possible configurations of tendon and joint in figures of all make and model. He recalled the pressure of an arm on the small of one man's back, and a slap claiming mockery in return. A meal, escaped.

Much to his dismay, this very man's eyes were only drawn closer to his skin. Hannibal worked to hold still as he grabbed his hand, spreading its fingers to reveal flecks of dark pencil in the soft webs between each digit.

"I have made no mistake- your hands are dirty with graphite. Only my dear friend Hanne would keep all her appearance pristine, yet forget to clean her hands after making masterpieces," he hissed, tongue flicking out between his teeth like a snake.

"May I ask, what was your friend's surname?" A diversion of proof.

"Sforza."

Hannibal nodded, ever-courteous, keeping teeth just beneath the surface, "And I am of the Lecter bloodline."

"And I of the Sordino line. What does it matter?" he mocked, eyes returning to study Hannibal's face.

He allowed himself to be observed, this time with an eye more furious, eager to point out every betrayal of bone and fault of flesh. This bought Hannibal time to put long-lost pieces together.

Coda Sordino, once a model for local Florentine art students, had been known as the living Adonis. He and Hannibal had interacted, briefly, as student and model during a sketching seminar in his youth. He had been quite beautiful, then- but beauty does not imply benevolence; he was known for a rude tongue and impulsive hand. Hannibal had caught his eye, still bearing the bruises of flowing hair and a visible, unscarred chest; he rejected Sordino's advances only to be met with threats of violence and a red-purple wrist.

Hannibal refused to be helpless, even then; he bore his claws, gnashed his teeth, had fought to no end. But the ever-resourceful Adonis had escaped, spear in hand; Hannibal did not have the time to display him, ribs spread and gored on the tusks of a wild boar, dead in the arms of a weeping, disfigured Aphrodite- a perversion of beauty, a pig's-heart beneath human flesh.

How fitting, that Sordino had turned to his namesake after leaving Florence in a rage of rejection.

Hannibal pulled his hand away from the man. He would not be insulted; he would entertain these suspicions, if only to quell the grunting, squealing ego before him. He lowered his head, solemn with false defeat, before punctuating its rise with a retort, "It seems you have returned to your roots. Your name is much better suited for the music industry, than art and figure drawing."

"So you did not forget that I was once a beautiful model." He met Hannibal's eyes, confidence growing as his voice grew louder, "You have drawn me yourself more times than I can count. Do you still keep the drawings? Hang them up on your walls?"

Sordino's audacity was astounding. To assume he still held so important a position in Hannibal's life, after so long a time, brought Hannibal to the end of his taut chain. He wanted to tear the man apart into nothing but shreds of flapping skin; he and Will had come to find a meal, after all, but cold rationality had settled beside his hedonistic intentions. They would find a richer, more complex meat without issue.

"If you don't mind, I will excuse myself and be on my way," Hannibal forced out, turning to leave with a plea of suffering eyes in Will's direction.

As he and Will turned their backs to him, Sordino grabbed the cuff of Hannibal's sleeve, clamouring for the last word. The grip held Hannibal still only a moment before he tried shaking it off, but to no avail- wrists bound yet again in the snout of swine.

"Your name is a lie," Sordino hissed, trapping Hannibal's hand until its tips purpled and swelled like a ripe eggplant. He pulled it close to his face, stroking it with a violent, violating softness as he purred, "You have her skilled fingers. 'The ivory of the piano keys is carved from my bones,' she would joke."

Hannibal wasted no time in pulling away once more, this time with such force that he careened backwards into Will. His growing lack of grace and the shopkeeper's increasing rudeness had brought Will to a point of simultaneous concern and ferality. He snapped a hand to Hannibal's shoulder, squeezing hard enough to leave love-dark marks.

"Let's leave."

He took Will's palm and held it, tight and shaking. Will maneuvered his way around the short man, pulling Hannibal with him as he bolted towards the door, leaving Sordino to stumble after them. They made it out and into the street, bell ringing after them in anger; the man would not follow them there. Instead, he stood in the doorway and spat, eyes wide and brows raised, "And you found yourself a husband, Signorina!" He shouted towards Will, eyes threatening to shut from a bitter forced smile, "Congratulations, young man! Waste no time, for you will both soon be too old to bear children."

Hannibal would have laughed at the irony, if he were calm. He would have returned to his and Will's house without a fight, would have planned an elaborate feast that would sustain them for weeks. He would have uttered a word to close the newly-gaping wound.

Instead, he tore his hand away from his lover's, leaving himself helpless as the conjoined twin dead and discarded by knife and scalpel. He could hear glass shatter against the pavement, spilling its bloody contents into the flimsy vascular system of pavement and plastic. He did not look back to see Will, motionless once more in silent surrender. He thought of the hand still open to hold empty space against its cooling skin, then thought of it no more.

Hannibal ran.

He passed swarms of people, hovering and flying face-first into their meals like flies. He dared not bump into them; he could keep that much composure, at least. He knew not whether embarrassment or the simple urge to flee moved him out of his lover's arms, but anger stood proud in its unarguable presence. To deny his becoming was a sin that lay heavy on any man's shoulder; Sordino had committed it before the eyes of the dualistic gods themselves.

The knot in Hannibal's throat only pulled tighter the farther he ran. His muscles and his breath could not act in perfect harmony, catching and weakening against uneven pavement; how he wished for Will's arm of support. But he had left Will far behind; he couldn't turn back now, for fear of sight.

He had run past an open area of greenery, reaching narrower streets and darker alleys. Harsh sunlight bounced off stone-siding walls, spreading its rays into a soft blurriness that warmed pockets of darkness into soft-lit havens. Hannibal stopped to admire the sun's mastery of motion; he leaned against the wall with a heaving chest and failing legs. He'd left the crowd

behind with Will. He could hear barely a soul, let alone a beating heart, wandering the empty streets. Hannibal closed his eyes and allowed the peace to wash over him.

There was no respite to be found.

The faint tapping of footsteps against cobblestone shone brighter than the call of any frightened street-pigeon. They came from behind; Hannibal kept his eyes closed to find their specific direction. The steps moved from left to right behind him, soft in their fall and swift in their gate.

As they traveled to his right side, Hannibal opened his eyes to approach the corner of the wall. He lay his feet down heel-first, muffling their click- his pursuer's single fault. He lifted his hands in preparation to capture the squeaking mouse of a man, snapping his metaphorical coils like a whip ready to strike.

To his surprise, no prey fell into claws. He spotted a shadow flying through the street just one building down from him, and lunged towards it in spite of his oversight. He ran once again, shoes pounding the ground with each stride, feet sending gravel ricocheting off buildings with each leap.

The shape turned clearer. A black cloak floated behind the figure in motion, whose legs danced long and thin. Hannibal could smell the fear oozing through its skin as it ran; he could see the hormone-rich blood flowing through its legs, down to its ankles and toes. Its deer-feet, ever-graceful on grass, could not withstand the pavement's harsh surface; the prey-hooves caught on an errant stone and brought it tumbling to the ground with a grand crash.

Hannibal's hand landed on the bloodied ground before the creature's face. He could feel the air escaping its nostrils in heaving, fearful gusts; he lowered his head to rate the point-value of his catch.

It had the dark hooves of an ever-running deer, and hair like long, black nights in the wilderness. The wounded thing craned its neck to look at him- to beg, maybe. The move revealed a single dark, thin scar across its throat. Its eyes, their lashes fluttering with fear, pierced his own, catching them in their bright blue headlights.

It was a girl, more trembling animal than man; a girl born of deer.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Summary: Hannibal and Will go to the farmer's market. They find a music shop in front of which a violinist is performing a piece. Will recognizes the song from his childhood. They then enter the music store to buy a harpsichord for their home (courtesy of Hannibal). When Hannibal sits down at the piano to play, the store owner hears him, and recognizes the piece. He is completely convinced that Hannibal is an old friend of his from Florence, recognizes that he has transitioned, and repeatedly misgenders him on purpose. The man turns out to be Coda Sordino, a once-beautiful model that

Hannibal had drawn in his youth. He recalls Sordino attacking him and later escaping; until now, they had not met again. This results in a conflict, with Hannibal running away from Will in (almost uncharacteristic) panic and wandering the streets. He hears he is being followed, chases down and injures his pursuer, and finds that it's a girl with long, black hair, and a thin scar on her neck.

Cadenza

Chapter Summary

Such a physical mark of ownership, flowers pressed into its lip-plush skin, burned bright and irresistible before Hannibal's eyes.

Chapter Notes

be warned this is very long

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Get off me." Quiet, yet firm.

The girl dared not touch him; Hannibal could tell her plea was a feeble attempt to escape the situation. He wasn't towering over her, or even touching her; he pulled back slowly, carefully lifting each hand off the ground one by one.

As he moved, the girl's glowing pupils grew black with adrenaline as she let out a quiet whimper. Her voice, while soft, did not tremble, and neither did the hands at her side. She released a long-held breath from her chest and pulled herself up. She ran a hand over her pants, occupying herself with shaking off the dust that had caught from her fall.

Hannibal watched as she continued to look over herself, attempting to relieve tension; she was no threat to him, and vice versa- or rather, he was not in the mood to be a threat. Even then, she did not run when released; she was braver than most caught in his grasp. He stated plainly, tongue laying calm, "I apologize for scaring you. I was running to defend myself."

The girl nodded, stretching her hand out for him to shake. Hannibal did not hesitate; it was simpler to touch the hands of a stranger than an intimate. He took it into his and gave a firm tug.

They squeezed their hands together in what seemed a sign of forgiveness, but Hannibal would not waste this opportunity to gather information. A tight hold revealed to him a mastery of tension and muscle control. The drag of rough callouses against the soft slope of his palm betrayed pressure and practice. He released her hand immediately; this was the violinist who had enamoured his beloved Will.

The girl shifted her weight to one foot. Her speed pulled Hannibal into a defensive stance; each was now assessing the other for safety, though the girl stood lopsided. Her foot floated

in air, muscles working to keep pressure off the bones that had resulted in capture. A weak stream of blood trickled from the darkening spot on her sock- strong enough to saturate the white cotton, but not to drip to the ground. It was metallic and rich with carbon as it flowed out fresh, though its strength lessened as it filtered through crushed gravel.

"Why are you following me?" Hannibal asked simply, a question demanding only in words.

The girl tilted her head in the direction they both had come from, as if pointing. "Your friend liked my music."

"That is no excuse to stalk me," he scolded. Had Will brought so much attention to himself? Hannibal had no doubt that Will's beauty could enrapture the minds of gods, but the people around them were certainly not divine in nature. He saw his hands placing a veil around Will in his shamelessness, keeping him from all eyes except his own- keeping Will in godhood, away from the mortal realm. He would wrap the silk veil around his throat and watch the flowers pour out of it season after season, all into the garden of their two mouths.

The fire of possession spread up Hannibal's throat, scorching twigs of rationality until it reached the water of his tongue. He would not have known Will enjoyed such interpretations of beauty, if not for this empty-handed violinist.

"But I do appreciate you remembering our faces."

She offered him a smirk, as if expecting the response. It smoothed out into something genuine as she muttered, "I wanted to thank you for listening. I could tell you didn't like it." She averted her eyes with the last few words.

It was possible that the girl was harmless, and only curious. There was a boldness to her demeanor that both unnerved and intrigued Hannibal; he could carry on this conversation, if only for entertainment.

While contemplating the playfulness of his next words, a soft gust of wind carried her scent on its breath, pulling Hannibal's chin up to catch the air. She smelled like Sordino's musty wooden shop; particles of the pig's essence saturated her presence.

Hannibal gave the girl a single questioning look before stepping closer. She raised her hands in defense, backing away as her voice grew louder with sudden panic, "My father was yelling at you and your friend. You ran off- I just wanted to see what was going on."

Disappointment settled between his brows. She was no special exception; one display of slight intimidation, and the girl's boldness shattered. The fact that Sordino could be her father was no downside, though- only new, interesting information. He went to clarify, but the girl caught the empty parting of his lips. Words fluttering like startled wings, she rushed out, "My name is Cadenza Sordino."

He nodded; this was clarification enough. Hannibal offered the universe only a moment to let his thoughts linger on Sordino's intentions- had he raised a family under the veil of song to hide his boorish nature? The idea was not worth spending much time on, but nonetheless,

Hannibal found it amusing- a blip of coincidence in the grand opera of his life. "Your father has found his passion for music in more ways than one, it seems."

Cadenza's shoulders dropped as a gentle smile crept out through her teeth. "He's in it for the money, you know. Can't even play 'Mary had a Little Lamb' on the piano," she laughed.

How quickly her demeanor changed from defensive, to terrified, to calm and amiable-people-pleasing, perhaps. Hannibal found some amusement in the fact she was trying to predict his emotions and respond accordingly, though he would not play with her responses; it would be of more benefit to keep her mind at ease.

Hannibal had paid more attention to Will's joy and the violinist's music over her appearance, but had the mind to now take it in as her guard eroded away as the cliffs far behind them. Cadenza wore her dark hair loose, letting it drape behind her like a cape in the wind. It swayed as she checked behind her shoulder, falling over her neck to cling to her throat, the thin dark line across the pale column only growing more prominent. It seemed to be a long-healed laceration, and incredibly precise. It had barely nicked the carotid, considering her survival- not deep enough to be much more than an accident.

Hannibal did not let memories of shattered teacups and sliced arteries fill his mind. He did not deny their presence; he only allowed them to float before his field of mental vision like windswept storm clouds. He let the refracting raindrops of his eyes fall to Cadenza's mouth as it quirked with newfound friendliness.

"Where were you running to?"

She had already insulted her father in front of him; Hannibal risked reciprocating the sentiment. "Far away from your father," he commented, concealing a sigh of distaste beneath rushed breath.

Cadenza's voice grew hushed as she lowered her head, almost ashamedly, "I heard some of it." She quickly recovered, though, turning the conversation towards Hannibal. "You left your friend behind. Poor man seemed lost."

Hannibal predicted Will would return home without him, but the thought that he was still waiting tugged at his collar. He would not know of Will's whereabouts until he returned home; he wouldn't be able to do anything, until then. The fact coiled ever-tighter around him; not knowing what Will would do was deliciously exciting, yet terrifying in its unpredictability.

"I will return to him soon," he stated blankly to calm the woman's fears, if he could not his own.

This seemed to satisfy Cadenza. She turned, making to walk away a short distance, but instantly winced and reached for her ankle. Hannibal watched her teeth drag against each other to gently push out the masseter muscle. It was a trait he had always admired in the Sordino family; even the most inexperienced of artists could appreciate the beauty of its prominence, in a man once younger.

Hannibal met Cadenza's expectant glance, her frustration catching on his tongue and pulling out false sympathy, "I would attend to your wound, if I had the supplies. I am a medical doctor."

"Doctor Sforza, according to my father."

He flinched, imperceptible to all but one. The correction came from his mouth unscathed by the reaction, smoothly, "Doctor Lecter."

"Doctor Lecter," Cadenza repeated, bringing her head up and down as her intonation rose and fell, "there's a place by my home with bandages and medical stuff if you need it."

Hannibal gave a subtle nod, gesturing towards the path before them for Cadenza to lead the way. She stared at him for a moment, squinting as if to judge his intentions, though she quickly turned her back to him, starting on the road with an enthusiastic trot. Hannibal followed just behind her, though with distance; he did not want to intrude on her space so soon after a physical altercation.

The space between them, while wide for comfort, did not lend itself well to conversation. Hannibal raised his voice enough to send it flying across the chasm, posing an attempt at obtaining useful information as simply a friendly question, "Do you not live with signor Sordino?"

"I have my own flat right now; I'm on summer holiday from university. I'll be gone once the school term starts again."

Hannibal hummed as a sign of confirmation, a hint of secondhand pride springing from his chest. Cadenza seemed so young, and yet bore her accomplishments deep beneath a humble skin; it was truly a pity, that she stayed to serve her excuse of a father. Even still, Hannibal could not push away the sprig of hope that grew anew from wilted memory; the trapped deer had finally been freed from the love of all her fathers. He could watch the fawn place its cautious steps onto fresh green ground. He could give it a push to jump and dance, stretching its twine-tied legs and running from the hands that held it captive no more.

There was an undeniable vitality to her presence- as was her namesake. Cadenza warmed to Hannibal wonderfully; it seemed she transferred all her cervine restlessness to her mouth. She remained open and talkative, pointing out neighbours and giving him glimpses into their short, well-spent time. He need not even ask; she provided all the information needed as a local.

They passed a curiously-ornamented building, with visible beams pressed up against cream walls. Hannibal's gaze fell to the sign creaking above the door- a generic leather goods store. He peered through its windows to see if the interior was just as intriguing as the exterior, but to no avail- nothing of interest.

Cadenza had walked a fair amount farther than Hannibal, whose pace had slowed to sit with his curiosity. He noticed this and spread his legs wider with each step to catch up, only to find the woman running towards him.

"We just missed it!" she yelled, veering crookedly towards the shop that had fascinated Hannibal so. Panting, Cadenza placed a hand on the door, turning the handle with a squeak and whispering, "Back here."

Hannibal trailed behind her, opting to hold the door for himself; Cadenza huffed with displeasure as he ushered her forward into the dark establishment.

The smell of leather bombarded all of Hannibal's senses; he walked into the shop blind. He would call the scent overwhelming, if not for its velveteen richness- a mark of quality. He could make out the thick stripes of belts and buckles as his eyes adjusted to the dim light of the store. Cadenza, unaffected by the changing conditions, ran right up to the counter and waved at the cashier, who returned her smile. She ducked below the counter, disappearing behind a wall of wood.

Upon closer inspection, the buckles seemed of unique design and excellent material. One belt bore a stag's form at its tail-end, its coat of gleaming brass, its light underbelly of soft silver. Hannibal passed a hand over the accompanying leather, eyebrows raising with satisfaction; he would have to ask about the local smithery, if this was the quality of their output. Only a flock of firm yet delicate hands could accomplish such mastery.

Cadenza reemerged with a neat wad of cloth rolls and tubed ointment, completing her search with no more than a faint rustling, drawing Hannibal's attention.

"Bandages, right here," she said, dragging out the vowel in "right" as she slid them across the glass-topped counter. She then bent down once again to organize the chaos she had stirred, just out of sight.

Hannibal considered the supplies for a moment before confessing, "You seem well enough to walk and run on your feet. I would only need to assist you with minor wound care, which you could readily perform by yourself."

The woman did not respond immediately. Hannibal leaned over the counter ever-so-slightly, only to be pushed backwards by a mass of dark hair springing up into his face. Cadenza smiled, teeth poking out from the force of it, "I'd feel much better under a doctor's supervision."

"And not in a medical facility?"

She gave Hannibal a silencing glare and pulled up a chair, plopping down onto it and propping her injured foot up against the high counter. She took an alcohol wipe and ran it over the wound, dabbing at it with a hiss before pressing a gauze pad to the raw flesh. Hannibal ceased his observation; Cadenza could handle this on her own. He decided to look around the store and become familiar with his surroundings.

One man, spray-stiff hair adding almost a foot to his height, manned the cash register. Hannibal recognized him as the person Cadenza had waved to upon slipping behind the counter. Behind the frizz of his hair lay a door; muffled voices spilled out of the dark, sweet-smelling space. Hannibal averted his eyes, choosing to wait until the cashier moved away to investigate further.

His attention wandered to the display that had greeted him at the doorway. He felt the pull of a lead at his neck, taking his feet into steel cuffs and dragging them to the seemingly inconspicuous items. Returning to the rack, he ran his eyes over the hanging belts once more- some brown, some black, some a pale, skin-bright tan. His attention was forcefully captured once more by the belt with the stag at its tail, bright and shining on its ball-and-chain of dark leather. Hannibal took it into his hand, letting its edges dig into his palm as the rest of it swung throughout his journey to the counter. He would not admit it aloud, but what propelled him forward was more a drive of genuine curiosity than stalling for time away from Will.

Will.

Through the chaos of the animal urge to escape the cage, Hannibal had neglected to consider Will. It was not as if he had forgotten him; that much was an impossibility. He had only given him a fleeting thought, carrying the hope that he would find him where he left him- or sitting in their house. There was no predicting where Will had gone.

The vulnerability of them both crept up on Hannibal. He despised his own reaction to Sordino's accusation; he had not controlled himself enough to keep from running and leaving Will. Hannibal smiled- something aching- at how Will's impulsivity had crossed into his bloodstream so effortlessly, without his knowledge. There was a superb terror to it; he could not fully predict himself anymore. He'd left his beloved alone and without his hand to carry his bags, without his hand to hold, without his soul to speak to- barely of his own free will.

A new regret.

Upon reaching the register, the cashier looked Hannibal up and down with an air of piqued curiosity. He noticed the man move back slightly as he got closer; Hannibal wondered how these people had honed their intuition to such a fine pencil-point. He laid the belt down across the counter, its buckle gently clacking against the glass.

"I could not help but notice the quality of craftsmanship on this belt. Are all of your products made locally?"

The cashier straightened, clearing his throat and donning a rehearsed smile, "Sure are, sir! Even our rivets are made on-site just next door." He gestured to the wall behind him- supposedly where the smithery was. His hand then changed shape to point to Cadenza, who was just finishing wrapping her ankle in an absorbent bandage, "Miss Sordino here comes up with lots of our designs. Won't find anything like them anywhere else for sure."

Cadenza waved her hand dismissively, batting away the praise, "Don't buy it, he's just advertising."

"Don't make me pull your plans out to show this fine gentleman," the man threatened playfully.

"Why do you still have those?" Cadenza's head shot up to the cashier, eyes wide.

"Might frame 'em," he teased, receiving only a glare in return. He then turned to Hannibal, nodding feverishly and half-running towards the dark doorway behind him, "They're awful

nice sketches, sir. I'll go get-"

Before he could cross the doorway's threshold, Cadenza was tearing at his jacket with sheathed claws, pushing him through the door and arguing with the poor cashier all the way through. Hannibal left them to their squabble with a polite lowering of the head, for decency's sake. The pair disappeared into the dark void of a room behind them, voices drowned out by the cacophony of babbling, humming mouths that lay beyond the doorway.

They reemerged papers-first, the cashier thrusting the plans forward with pride. Cadenza followed, limping and only slightly defeated after the ordeal. She sighed, placing the stack onto the counter before Hannibal, "No way am I letting him take out the originals, so here's our official catalogue."

"And," the cashier added as he crept up behind Cadenza, cheekily letting a graphite sketch fall onto the counter like an autumnal leaf, "one drawing."

Hannibal did not have to look up from the catalogue to feel Cadenza's fiery glare burning a hole straight through the man. He brought some praise into the spreading flames in an attempt to douse them, "A rare thing nowadays, to have your entire selection in print."

Cadenza sighed again, heavier than before- likely to recenter. She pushed her way past the cashier to face Hannibal, smiling once more, "Lots of rare things here."

She spread both papers out atop the counter, taking a finger to guide Hannibal across the geographical map of sketches.

He would call them much more than sketches, though. While they were lacking the more complex metal components he'd seen earlier, each drawing held the rich texture of leather. Each dip, each clasp and stitch, were meticulously drawn; Hannibal felt he could pick them up from the paper canvas and hold them in the palm of his hand.

Aside from the sheer skill involved, the completed designs were another thing to marvel at. A few, like the stag-head buckle he'd seen before, ornamented the corners of the paper in little squared-off thumbnails; the larger designs took up more space. While the basic product shapes- purses, cuffs, belts, collars- were present, each had an outstanding feature. One collar, complete with smaller sets for the wrists and ankles, was embossed with a trail of roses along the outside that translated to the other smaller restraints. The vines' point of origin was the metal-studded center, as if flowing from the cold maw of the manmade material; Hannibal was reminded once again of Botticelli's Primavera- the flowers Zephyrus draws forth from the mouth of Chloris.

Such a physical mark of ownership, flowers pressed into its lip-plush skin, burned bright and irresistible before Hannibal's eyes. He could almost see the vines wrapping around Will's neck, tightening around the branches of carotids and jugulars until not even a finger could relieve their pressure. He could see the flowers pouring out of Will's mouth, bringing him to a melodious gasping, choking cry until he turned more divine than even the gods themselves could imagine.

The fountain of temptation before Hannibal could never run dry, though it could be suppressed for the time being; Hannibal turned his thoughts of bloodied flower petals to ones of webs of thin neuronal branches inside Will's skull.

Will had reacted strongly in response to talk of Zephyr of Chloris. He had barely considered the beauty of forced godhood- but that could not be attributed to a flaw. Perhaps Will saw himself in Chloris's place, helpless to stop the stream of earth's bounty being pulled from his stomach. If only he would be able to show Will that he was no longer Chloris, but Zephyr, wielding the power of all winds to bring others to their knees. The hand-drawn image lay deep in the pages of a long-lost sketchbook, last opened in front of the Primavera itself- before Will had dropped his forgiveness.

This was not a problem of repressed becoming, then; Will had accepted his transformation in full. Rather, it was an issue of something buried deeper in the folds of Will Graham's beautiful mind; Hannibal would have to pull it out by the roots. They had moved past violation of the body, as a pair; maybe Will had not, as an individual.

Hannibal took a moment to meditate on Will's pain.

The collision of their hands brought about both pain and pleasure, despair and divinity, hate and love. It transcended what was known to be human, and yet- they were both still men. Hannibal's touch had planted its seeds in Will's abdomen, digging its roots into his heart and nervous system; Will tensed and relaxed under Hannibal's hand like a worshipper trapped by the bodily contortions of frenzied, divine madness. Every caress brought to the surface memories of both the utmost affection and the most terrifying pain imaginable, all stored in the rabbit-heart that beat madly inside Will's chest.

Hannibal was grateful Will did not flinch when they embraced.

He would pull Will's fear to the surface, yes, but would transform it into something purer, sweeter than the muddied waters of hormones that flooded both their veins. He would take Will's vulnerability, and nurture it with more care and understanding than he had years before; he would not break Will Graham's mind with fear alone, but with love- a love borne not only of detached curiosity, but of something human- a love made of flesh and bone. He would reverse time and mend the damage done to the teacup, before he had condemned Will to a fate between bars and flames of inflammation-laced insanity.

Still, a barrier remained. Physical keepsakes could never communicate the true depth of his and Will's understanding; they could be ornaments for the temple, but not the sacred relics within. But that was for Will to decide, in part. Hannibal could not make a final decision without him. He could purchase the items and allow Will to see if he liked them; if he was to elevate Will to a new form of godhood, he would ask. He would ask Will if this was the next branch to add onto the antlers of his becoming. He would ask Will if he needed a tangible representation of their bond, or if a spiritual exchange of power was enough. He would ask if this felt better than subconscious manipulation through psychotherapy. He would ask if it all was better- if it all was enough.

He was making many vows to himself and himself alone, Hannibal noticed.

He would die before he broke them. One's vows and one's intent are the scapulae on which Atlas bears the weight of the world.

But on to more urgent matters.

There had been an air of understanding throughout the shop when he had entered- that the ordinary had no place here. It had been subtle, before, but was now meeting Hannibal face to face; he could act freely, he could buy what pleased him. When was the last time he had even considered using tools besides his hands and body for lovemaking?

There was an intimacy unique only to hands; that much could not be denied. His hands created art and beauty beyond description, and touched one being made of cosmic force that defied all spoken language. But they brandished a blade just as naturally as claws, and maneuvered garrote wire as abstractly as the theremin's invisible strings; Hannibal was no stranger to tools that enhanced the hands' performance. Will would most certainly struggle to accept something that did not belong to Hannibal's body, if his very presence was enough to set Will's heart running for its life. He would practice patience.

How similar all this was to the original controlled plan for Will's becoming, was no sudden realization to Hannibal. He would alter the ancient idea and manipulate it under a lens of intimacy. He prayed Will would notice his intent; the man was incredibly perceptive, even when calm under the weight of his lover. Teacups were coming back together, and all due to the wonderful lead of the woman standing before him.

"These are just some basic designs, but you get the idea. We do custom engravings, leather embossing, dyeing, and custom fitting. Take your fill."

Each option flickered in Hannibal's mind like embers of a dying fire stoked by the wind. An engraving would allow his purchases to be owned by no others, putting their names to metal like ancient paintings to stone- Will, Hannibal. Theirs. It was an easy train of thought to move through, unobstructed by conflict of acceptance or pain; ownership was a concept as natural to Hannibal as the flow of running water under gravity. He did not wonder about the symbolic importance of such a thing, only seeing it a simple claiming. No doubt it was the same for Will; they were made of the same cosmic matter.

It was the embossing of intricate designs that had brought forth the revelation of teacups and time. Hannibal could see in his mind's eye Will's pale skin decorated by earth-dark straps, covered in delicate petals and curling vines that sang of spring and sublime transformation.

Hannibal slipped his next words through the tight seal of his lips carefully, cautiously, "And if I were to request a decorative leather collar not in this selection?"

The cashier took out a slip of paper, written and spoken words cohesive and flowing like running water, "What size do you need around the neck?"

"42 centimeters." Known by heart; exploration by touch and tongue yielded very accurate measurements. "I would like this design in dark brown, with an alteration to the flowers: strawberry flowers, not roses as on the original," he pointed to a different flower-wrapped collar with his chosen pattern to clarify, "and an engraving."

"Words for the engraving?"

"Will. W-I-L-L."

The cashier hummed in confirmation as he wrote down the name before speaking once more, "We'll call when we have some potential designs brought up. We have a wide selection in the back for you to see more, if you'd like, while we set this up for you. If you'd like anything else custom made, just pass it by Miss Sordino and we can give you a quote for additional requests." The words were accompanied by a nod in the woman's direction, dismissing Hannibal and allowing him to roam freely throughout the store.

Hannibal followed the ghost-trail left by the cashier's pointing finger to the back of the store. Unlike Sordino's shop, which held a great piano gallery that extended far throughout the entrails of the building, this store put up a barrier wall. It was almost harsh in its placement-immovable brick that towered over the working mortals, staggering in its size. Amongst the artificiality of brick, though, the floor-to-ceiling display of products that hung on the wall brought a flooding river of soul to the great stone giant of a wall. Loops of leather hung from every inch, curling and flowing to the rhythm of their tanned, stretched grain. Hannibal's eyes caught and leapt from loop to loop, entering and exiting through cuffs made for wrists, necks, ankles, and all in between; if the catalogue had been a menu, this was the true feast.

He stepped up to the imposing figure, no more intimidated by it than a mongoose by a snake. This was no enemy, and he did not have to wrestle with the gods to hold it in his hands. Hannibal had not felt such pure joy at the possibility of indulgence in so long; the opportunity that swelled in his chest had last been felt when Will had described the taste and texture of his thoughts, in Jack's office, so long ago.

Hannibal reached for the flower-wrapped collar he had seen in the catalogue. This iteration of it was colored a deep red, its silver hardware shining bright against the rich matte surface. He pressed a fingertip into the folded petals of a blooming rosebud, watching as the pocket of air gasped for breath upon release. He bent the leather in his hands, testing its softness before he set it upon ragged-run skin, feeling its firmness before planned moments of brute force. He unclasped the buckle around the back, and brought down one end of the collar to the tender flesh of his palm. It fell past the speed of gravity with a crack, stinging the pad of fat and muscle that sat beneath his thumb; a melodious sound. Firm enough to leave a growing red mark, but soft enough to lick the wound with dyed, processed tongue.

Hannibal doubted it would be used for such outwardly violent purposes, but could not neglect to test such effects. He had always adored how the body reacted to touch, whitening with a barricade of pressure, then allowing the holy flood of blood to return. Much to his disappointment, he could not yet ask Will to ascertain its tightness; the neck, while a tempting area to adorn with marks of force, had to be the one ark floating over the flood. Bloodflow could not be cut off. Hannibal had immense confidence in his measurements- Will had not complained about the custom-tailored shirts he had ordered years before. Still, he had to account for the exact pressure and tightness of the collar. Hannibal could not fully predict Will's preferences when it came to such matters, but could make some educated guesses; judging from Will's reactions to firm, direct touch, it was likely he would enjoy the constricting embrace.

Thoughts of practicality passed through Hannibal's mind with relative ease, neglecting to snag the restless stress-bitten edges of passionate ideation that paced in its cage, just out of reach. The animal only broke from between the bars when Hannibal caught sight of a lead.

It was not terribly unique like the other products- just a simple strip of brown leather, with a clasp at one end and a looped handle at the other. Its potential was endless- to push and to pull, to guide and to follow, to call and to come, to hold and to keep- as versatile as an open-armed prayer.

Hannibal took its handle into his hand, tucking the lead close to his side without even a confirmation for quality; such was the instinctual nature of this decision. While a collar has a symbolic purpose, a lead transforms its aesthetic beauty into palpable movement, with rolling shoulders and guiding force. Hannibal could feel roughened palms gliding against hardwood floor, digging into plush carpet and twisting silk bedsheets with heat; a lead makes its handler, and its captive, the harbingers of movement.

Hannibal's hunger for potential could not be sated with a mere leash, though. He continued to peruse the selection of items, gripping the lead tight as he moved forward. Each step had intent behind it, now; each firmly-planted foot brought a piece of the broken china plate back together, just beneath the teacup and just beneath the sole.

His eyebrow raised with curiosity as yet another collar fought tooth-and-nail for his attention. Hannibal let out a subtle smile; he had not wandered a store with the intention of buying all that piqued his interest in a long time. The last time he had even done something remotely similar was when he had obtained tailor-made clothing for Will, with the intention of bringing him to Florence; a shame, how that had turned out. Regardless, they had reached an understanding soon after in the guts of the Palermo chapel's catacombs- and Hannibal had brought the empty, soulless clothing for company, anyway.

This time, he would fill the skeletal remains of fine fabric with warm, breathing bodies. Hannibal let his hand fall to another collar, this one a simple matte black, lined with short, silvered fur. The strip of fluff was wider than on many other display collars, almost reaching the thickness of Hannibal's index finger in width; the collar's solidity and sheer size was bold and beautiful. Hannibal ran the ruler-assigned index over the inner material- soft chinchilla, revealing paler strands below the darker surface as he scraped a nail through it. While pleasant to the touch, Hannibal knew it would quickly turn uncomfortable for someone as sensitive as Will. Each feather-light fingertip pulled forth a pleasant shiver in call-and-response; matted, sweat-slick fur would only summon sighs of pain for the man. Hannibal, on the other hand, had always enjoyed how the material responded to his body, flattening and pressing against the currents of blood that coursed beneath his skin. He could not neglect the collar's overall luxury, as well. Its finesse and fragility stood unchallenged by even the finest collar made for the domesticated dog; it was made to fit man, and man only.

Hannibal tensed slightly as the air around him grew warmer with another person's presence. It was not a dangerous environment, but the potential for conflict lurked ever-present in the corridors of his mind. He turned around; it was only Cadenza.

"I knew you'd like it here," she boasted, leaning in to catch a glimpse of the object cradled in Hannibal's hands. She grinned at the thick collar, eyes crawling upwards to find Hannibal's

reaction.

The physical intrusions on his space, while not fully welcome, forced Hannibal to acknowledge her presence; he could not complain, for he had done the same to intimidate countless others throughout his lifetime. Their similarities, while only surface-level, had made a curious sort of fondness sit on the rough seas of Hannibal's ocean, bubbles rising next to great towers of seafoam that belonged to another.

"I could only expect such beautiful creations from a musician, an artist; you may call yourself a renaissance woman. With a penchant for manipulation," he added, a pointed phrase. While Cadenza's techniques were unrefined, if not for her pushing, he would not have otherwise entered the shop; it was simple and nondescript on the outside. Hannibal decided to present the woman with the possibility of danger and of risk, with a question only applicable to himself in half-truth, "You are lucky I am a man that appreciates indulgence and the joy of hedonism. What would you have done, if your products didn't appeal to my tastes?"

"But they do," Cadenza smiled, followed by a lilting sigh of wonder, "I find you very interesting. No sane person would try to kill me, insult my parents, and then offer me first aid." She looked to Hannibal's eyes, reading offense where only placid indifference sat, "Not that I mind. M'father's an arsehole."

"I regret to inform you I am very sane," he replied, knowing his words to be true.

"Sane enough to buy a collar for another man?"

"Would you mind adding another?" Hannibal added, pushing against the woman's marginally rude remark. He was met with silence, raising his eyebrows and ready to defend his decision as Cadenza's silence dragged on, but was cut off by soft reassurance.

"No worries, we see it all the time. Specifications?"

"Forty-three and a half centimeters, along with an extended width of seven centimeters. And an additional engraving. Similar to this," he displayed the fur-lined collar in his hand, taking a finger to the outside to punctuate his description, "in a silver color."

"Just write down the engraving," Cadenza continued as she clicked a pen, "and I'll make an adjustment to your order for you," she chirped; the woman was being genuine.

Cadenza passed him a notepad from her pocket, and he proceeded to write down the letters of his name, known to him as a universal truth. They flowed in his script, and he clarified as he handed back the notepad in case his handwriting could not be deciphered, "Hannibal."

Cadenza nodded, quickly looking over the name and stuffing the notepad back into her pocket. "I may be looking for customers, but I'm really looking for different people. Unique people. Weird people."

Silence passed between them, with Cadenza hurrying to change the imprint of her words in the air before Hannibal could take offense, "And not in a bad way. It's fine to be weird."

Hannibal smiled to himself- it sounded as if the words had come from his own mouth. Cadenza grabbed another belt hanging from the rack, rubbing its embossed ridges absentmindedly as she spoke, "I started this place to bring all us 'weird' people together," she said earnestly, raising a hand to make quotation marks around "weird". She stayed silent for a moment, as if remembering fallen soldiers; her mournful eyes betrayed nothing less grievous. She then put the belt back, turning to Hannibal with a weary smile, "Sometimes we can just sniff each other out."

"To build a home, to be alone," he remarked, earning a confused look from Cadenza. She gave a nod of courtesy as she left Hannibal's side in a flurry of hoofsteps, urging him to follow her lead with a wave of the hand.

"We have the designs you want in your size, but a custom embossing for a set and an engraving will take longer- two, even longer. We'll give you a call when they're shipped out."

"I would much rather receive them in person."

"No problem. Adds some intimacy to the whole thing, I get it."

Cadenza stepped up to the counter and opened her hand, allowing Hannibal to hand her the lead that had already found its home in his palm. She scanned it; he paid, gave Cadenza and the absent cashier a nod of gratitude, and left with little flair. All was well.

As he passed by the ghostly street he had ended up in after leaving the music shop, the once-crowded street before him had grown quiet. The people no longer moved as one viscous liquid, but as individual droplets that could not cause a flood. So peaceful was this transformation, that Hannibal took it upon himself to gather other household necessities; he successfully located the shampoo Will had used on the Nola- warm and woody, soft spice. Familiar. Its cap flicked open and closed with a muffled click instead of a thunderous snap- something Hannibal had come to appreciate. He placed it into his bag, making sure to separate it from the lead in case of a spill, and move on.

Walking past Sordino's storefront, Hannibal found a faded wine stain still etched into the ground. No glass sat abandoned nearby, but the scent lingered in the air from around the time he'd left Will; their other groceries must have fallen when he broke loose. A pity- it had been good wine.

Hannibal only mourned the loss of luxury for a moment before confronting Will reached the forefront of his mind. Pushing his thoughts far into the future had served a pleasant distraction, but did not prove practical. He had no useful knowledge of what Will had done, though the cleaned wine stain was comfort enough; Will had likely gone home. He would have to follow suit.

He let the conflict push and pull inside his mind like the tide. He had no option but to return home and open the door; he could not lock Will away for all eternity. He could not run away to another country to hide from the faded scars of his actions. Hannibal could only return to twist the doorknob and take in the glorious unpredictability of love's sorrow.

Chapter End Notes

so this one turned out wayyyyy longer than intended, but i am doing several things like introducing characters and bringing in important physical items so i guess it's warranted?

anyway i am having a ball writing this and i hope all of you are liking reading it so far! there will be MORE SEX i PROMISE but the tension has gotta build! and then comes the dreaded question of "is it realistic enough?" and "have I made a mistake introducing new things?" but then i remember that this is HANNIBAL we are talking about.

hannibal made a whole human heart valentine in a public chapel without getting caught. will was walking talking and flirting while balls deep in the hellhole of autoimmune encephalitis. we got anthony dimmond for two episodes and his meaning in life was to die and strengthen will and hannibal's relationship. i can do anything with this world i have created

i hope me casually saying a bunch of things in the notes brings some joy to somebody because i enjoy rambling like this right next to the other completely different writing style

okay i'm done talking thank you for reading :)

Revenio

Chapter Summary

Hannibal remained motionless in the cool, pale light around the doorway. Not even his fingers, which had been frantically pawing at the floor, kept their momentum; Will spoke to inject life back into them.

“Welcome back.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The wall clock hanging steady before him seemed louder than the pounding of his own heart. How still would the ticking grow, if he held his breath?

Will felt the couch cushion beneath him compress as he prepared to take a breath, expanding his lungs and allowing the air passage before he trapped it. They filled to a manageable capacity, inflating to a point where his soft lung tissue hardened under pressure. A pocket of air began its steady crawl up his throat, using notch after notch of cartilage as a grip. Its dull claws sank into the tough flesh, pulling Will's eyes open as he fought to close them, defying the instinctual breath to avoid death. Here started the silent war between organic heart and abstract will.

Alone without the input of his eyes, Will could hear waves of blood pressing up against the walls of his arteries, crashing through with the sheer force of a near-wrecked vessel- a sinking ship. The blood rushing through his temples slowed for one beat- two, three- and then silence.

A blurred darkness built up around Will's mind. It was not a blurred awareness, however, but simply a quieting of natural functions- his fear held its position, ever-steady sword sharp in hand. His lungs, stretching his skin with their air-pumped solidity, and his flesh, reddening under a slowing rhythm, were only background noise in comparison to the silence of apnea. All was gone- all except for the stifled screams of the mind to breathe, to breathe, to breathe.

The still heart-muscle revived in an instant. Its fist-sized strength pounded against his ribcage, faster, stronger, until Will could contain it no more. Will's chest emptied with one gust of wind, trapped air whistling past forests of bronchial trees, letting go with it a weak whine that pulled behind it a ragged, pleading gasp.

The clock had not stopped its ticking. His heart had not ceased its beating. His breath was now as rushed as the clock's songless hands.

Hannibal had not yet come back.

He could not bring himself to feel restlessness- a peculiarity. His mind, while racing, did not make his body twitch and pace around the empty living room. Had Hannibal felt so unusual a drive, when he ran away?

It was unlike the cannibal to abandon an object of incalculable worth when under pressure. The only times he had left Will alone were both performed as a statement; his gutting of Will had been an expression of unimaginable suffering that needed to be reciprocated, and his surrender to authorities had been an admission of defeat. Both had been words spoken through action, and his current abandonment was likely no different. Hannibal was not one to simply forget.

And yet, Hannibal had disappeared from Will's life countless times. He'd hidden under a false name in Florence, leaving only a trail of delicate origami tissue in his wake. He'd given Will the time to get married and move on, only giving him the gift of his incessant, invisible presence. Still- all this had been intentional.

Will's rib-breaking heartbeat could not bear the act having thought behind it. He could not always predict Hannibal's intentions, and when he could, never had he been met with a lack of intention. It grew to a stutter, a flutter of folded-muscle wings, until his chest could take it no more.

He cried out- a small, animal thing.

Objectively, it was not an impressive show of emotion. Hardly weeping, with barely a single tear falling from Will's eyes, at first. And still, the flood persevered. His chest heaved. His throat tightened and sent waves upon waves of stinging signals to his eyes, which spilled their oceanwater into the nets of his eyelashes. His tears stayed there, suspended in the thin hairs that guarded the entryway of his mind. They released upon blinking; the water lost its heat in mere milliseconds, reaching the stubble of his beard in a cool climax. Will tracked the journey of each droplet as they performed their individual swan songs- hot to cold, eye to floor. Ending with a bow. The rhythm of their fall, the ease of it, allowed Will a moment of peace to arrange his thoughts.

He hadn't been alone for months. Even when trying to stay separate, he and Hannibal had always been just walls away. The world had not grown so large as to allow other buildings, let alone other men, to fill the space between them; they were conjoined. He hoped Hannibal would feel the same; had they both not been scarred by the sharpened blade of abandonment, each equal in severity to the other? It seemed impossible for Hannibal to leave Will of his own accord, and the fingers that tugged at his heart pled the same.

The tidal wave of Hannibal's distress had faded after he ran. Will felt it fall away, bringing with it the wet-paper pulp of Hannibal's hide. He'd picked up the soaked rags in his fingers, standing in that square, and knew Hannibal would not return soon; how many years had it been since someone wronged him so? His pain had grown overwhelming, standing in that small shop beside a man with a mouth too big for his own good; they should have left much earlier, and all could have been avoided. Hannibal would not have left- though that was not for Will to regret, but for Hannibal to consider.

Will allowed himself some pride; all he could regret was not understanding Hannibal's reaction sooner. The consequences were not of his own actions. He stood from the couch, forcing relief into his chest by letting out a fragile breath. All he could do was wait, and all Hannibal could do was everything.

He could not keep himself from feeling Hannibal's pain, much less from worrying about him, but he could quell the fear that stemmed from his own thoughts.

Will stepped into the sunroom attached just beside the living room. He passed the dining table on the way, decorated with remnants of the morning's purchases- one saved wine bottle, and many more slightly-bruised foodstuffs. The loss had not been tragic, and they still had more than enough to last them at least a week, even with Hannibal's escape.

The sunroom was far enough away from the couch that it would give Will room to breathe- room away from a world without Hannibal, and into the mindscape to sit and contemplate a night full of him; as unexpectedly as Hannibal had fled, Will had let himself go in Hannibal's arms.

Last night had been irresistibly calm. It was a terrifyingly simple thing, to let Hannibal do with him as he pleased; he only had to pay with the clarity of his memory. It was reminiscent of old therapy- only then, he had been completely unaware. There remained a distant tug at his muscles, impulses at the synapses of his neurons, a single God-hand almost flush with the finger of a reclining Adam; much still remained. The physicality of the experience had been so firm and tangible that it lay ingrained in his bones; the muscles surrounding them ached. The psychology of it remained more abstracted, though, buried in folds and fears. He remembered Hannibal's ferocity and slipping grasp on humanity. He remembered the overwhelming, all-consuming touch that cloaked his body and his mind. He remembered not remembering- the moment where his thoughts lay suspended in a haze. The feeling, he could recall, but no other aspect of the moment was as solid.

Will did not want to be unaware of his own pleasure.

Even if he could not control his awareness fully, he didn't want it to be sculpted like wet clay in Hannibal's hands. He wanted to watch himself slip into the dark, rhythm-laced waters of his mind, only leaving Hannibal a spectator to his descent. The man could pull him out, if need be, but could not push him into the roiling ocean alone.

Will smiled; he'd done just that to Hannibal Lecter. No wonder the man wanted to keep him wrapped around his fingers as he had long ago; control had been scarce on his side.

He'd have to tell Hannibal that things would be different now. He would only fall apart at the seams for moments, minutes, motes of time that Hannibal would bear witness to, only a spectator to a miracle made by a god that had now mastered the matter of the cosmos.

The sunroom, bright when he had returned to the house alone, now vibrated with the echoes of dying sunlight. Much of the house was blue at dusk, purpling gently with the sun's daily rise and fall. Waves of dark navy warmed to a soft orange as the glow of lamplight dissipated through the air. All these colors mixed on the glowing hardwood beneath Will's feet, frigid boards interrupted by warm, lamplit artifice. He recognized the shifting display of the home

as a pattern- blue, then purple, and ending in a crown of gold as the light gave way to the sun's neutral cast. The reverse was true now, at dusk; the world faded to black-and-blue bruised skies.

He stepped up to the wall of windows before him, away from the heated body of the house. As the dark surrounded him, he pressed his nose up to the cold glass, merging himself with the cool and the calm. Its chill traveled up the bridge of his nose and into his eyes, pushing the blood from the delicate tissues and turning them pale. Will closed his eyes; he swore he could see the microscopic vessels in the white of his eye shrinking, rerouting their contents to his core.

A soft breath escaped his mouth in a reflexive sigh, fogging up the wall before him. Will separated himself from the surface and wiped it with his sleeve. Beneath the evaporating residue of salt on his breath, Will could see the ocean; he caught a glimpse of flickering lights off in the distance- likely cars or houses. He wondered if one of them belonged to the radiance of a familiar soul's presence.

The front door clicked open.

It was Hannibal.

Will tilted his head in mild amusement at how naturally the thought came about. He made to cover its swift emergence in reflex; there was simply no possibility of an intruder. The person had located the spare key. They were in a remote area. The rocks along the pathway were dangerous. No ordinary man could enter with any sort of ease, and Hannibal was no ordinary man.

He reevaluated the chain of instant, axon-leaping thoughts as he allowed the other being's life to fill the space around him. The person's- Hannibal's- footsteps fell crooked with a limp. The man had not experienced much trouble walking since they first came to the house; would it come back so soon? Was he hurt?

Will fought back the urge to help, opting instead to stay still and silent in the lightless sunroom. Only as an unseen object fell to the wood floor with a thud, did he slowly step towards the front door. He urged the floorboards not to creak beneath his feet; he wanted to see Hannibal uninterrupted in his arrival.

He was met with the sight of a startlingly disheveled figure kneeling on the floor, scrambling to pick up the contents of a fallen canvas bag. It trembled on its femurs, weaker than the crumbling pillars of Troy; collapse was inevitable. As the figure's hand shot to the floor to steady itself, it drew in breath upon labored breath, spilling and flooding its mouth in transparent torrents. The corridor was too dark to identify its facial features; Will knew it by breath alone. Hannibal was home.

Will stepped towards the light switch. As he lifted his arm and pinched his fingers to illuminate his beloved, all went silent. No shuffling. Barely a breath. He swore he could hear both their hearts beating unison, pounding in their scar-lined mortal chests.

Hannibal's attentive eyes were the first things to be caught by the light of Will's creation. So wide were they, that he could see their whites against the wine-dark irises; they mimicked the contrast between fat and muscle in a gaping wound. If he only stared a moment longer, Will knew he would see rounded sockets beneath the optic nerves, padded by bulging yellow fat and glistening red viscera. One slice, and all vision would be eliminated.

Hannibal remained motionless in the cool, pale light around the doorway. Not even his fingers, which had been frantically pawing at the floor, kept their momentum; Will spoke to inject life back into them.

"Welcome back."

"Was it good, not to see me?" the cannibal asked, lips moving as separate entities against the rest of his flesh.

"I prefer seeing you," Will admitted shakily, letting honesty poke its bright rays through his weakening blinds of shame. This was the lightening of a burden, the removal of sin at the confessional; the sin was not mortal, but human- barely venial. The weariness of worrying, the loneliness of waiting, the ghost of regret; he could leave it all behind, now that Hannibal was back. He was the source that had returned to gather the shards of toxicity that tore at the seams of his mind. He could help put him back together, if only by his very presence, as Hannibal himself found nourishment at the very sight of him.

A spark, a stoked ember of the hearth, returned to Hannibal's eyes. It cracked and danced, scorching the flesh at their edges into minuscule wrinkles that foretold a smile. "I admire your honesty, Will. You are gloriously shameless."

"Learned it from you."

Hannibal smiled, quiet, and returned with new life to placing the groceries sprawled out on the floor back in his bag, turning his head away. Will wanted him to look- to understand the worry he caused him. The urge did not originate from a desire for retribution, no, but for Hannibal to return his empathy. If Will asked for Hannibal to understand him, the cannibal needed to understand the emotional consequences; he needed to show Hannibal just how much they had merged.

"Why are you limping?"

"I ran from you much faster than is considered safe. During the current stage of the healing process, quick movements and total weight-bearing are not recommended."

"So you shouldn't be kneeling right now," Will said, letting the sweetness of care blend with bitter reprimand.

Hannibal caught his intent immediately. "It is better than running unsupported. Some of my weight is distributed to the knees and feet," he added, giving each respective body part a slice of his pupil.

Will knew Hannibal was aware of himself and his limitations. Still, the frayed threads of his veil lay entangled in his muscle fibres, even now; Hannibal could be pushing him away, putting up a tapestry of artifice. Will took it upon himself to offer Hannibal the choice to remove that veil, if he so chose; one encourages autonomy not through pressure, but through controlled freedom.

"How was it, getting up the rocks?" Will said as he inched towards the cane propped up against the wall. It was their only remaining assistive device; it had to be used wisely. Will rarely needed it, though his leg acted up every once in a while. Hannibal needed it to keep his independence; that much, Will could not deny him.

"I fell and sustained an injury. Don't worry about me; it doesn't require treatment," he breathed gritted teeth as he tried to stand, *"only time."*

Will rushed to his side, cane in hand, timing the gesture. He pressed its head into Hannibal's palm and watched in wonder as the fingers grasped it automatically.

"So eager to give in to my unsaid demands?" Hannibal questioned with a grunt as he let the cane drop to the floor, emphasizing the act's intent by keeping his eyes locked with Will's. Without the support, though, the cannibal fell sideways into Will's arms, breathing heavily. A twinge of guilt settled beneath Will's skin as he bent to pick up the cane, falling into his own hand just between the mounts of Jupiter and Saturn; could they have avoided this? Was his pity born too late?

He slid his arm just beneath Hannibal's to keep him upright; his chest pressed up against the man's back. One hand still held the cane in front of Hannibal, dangling it before him like a frozen rodent before a domesticated snake- lacking fire.

"It's not a demand. Here. You need it."

"Thank you," Hannibal signed after a breath, hand falling, gracefully this time, from mouth to cane.

It was unusual how Hannibal's changes in language aligned with his mood. While Will experienced something similar- usually when overwhelmed or fearful- the rate at which it happened for his other always fascinated him. It was no surprise that Hannibal processed his discomfort immediately, but exceptions to this had been emerging as of late- his nighttime stormchasing, or his escape from Sordino. This would be a night full of exceptions, Will concluded.

Still, some things remained constant, such as this inconsistency of language, or volatility of mood; it seemed the cannibal's peace of mind had returned, if only for a fragile moment.

He pushed Hannibal forward with a palm on his back, allowing him to find balance with the cane and his feet. Will offered up his body as a crutch for Hannibal's other side; the man accepted it without complaint. They walked like this, two pairs of legs blending into four as the lamplight around them blurred their silhouettes. The light around them turned warmer as they neared the kitchen, shining down onto the dining table like a spotlight illuminating a perfect, preaching prima donna.

Their initial meeting had been cold, but the surrounding warmth settled into the space between them; Will attempted to pull it over his teeth and speak of his trust with compassion, "Do I need to ask where you've been?"

He caught Hannibal's gaze expectantly, awaiting a response, but received only an empty stare in return. From the corner of his eye, Hannibal's fingers moved to develop a half-formed, single-handed sentence, "*I can't speak or sign correctly like this.*"

Will clenched his jaw and nodded, directing them both to the dining room table where they could sit together properly.

He let Hannibal fall from his arms onto one wooden chair, taking the cane from his hand and dropping it to the floor. The lamplight above fell almost halo-like upon his hair; it shimmered as Hannibal shifted his position ever-so-slightly.

"I'll be back. Just getting what you dropped," Will said as he hurried back towards the front door. He knew Hannibal would not move.

A messy pile of bags lay discarded on the ground. Out of them spilled fruit, gardening supplies, a fair amount of varied toiletries, and a thin leather strap- likely a handbag of sorts. Will gathered it all back into the bags, letting their handles dig into the padded segments of his fingers as he lifted them. They were stronger than the plastic ones he'd used earlier, and would not break; Hannibal had taken it upon himself to protect their contents. Will reached a curious hand into one bag to determine what held such great value, and by chance pulled out the strip of leather.

It was quite more than just a strip, in valuable hindsight; it was a simple leather leash.

Will was more curious, than anything; they didn't own any dogs. Had Hannibal taken his comment about missing his pack to heart? Even then, Will could not allow hopeful naïveté to dictate his next words. A leash had many more potential uses, and was useless without a collar- unless Hannibal Lecter could be the God-born words that brought light to the empty, useless universe. There was no lack of creativity in the cannibal's mind.

With a huff of latent curiosity, he wrapped the leash around his hand and kept it outside the bag. The possibility had dawned on him that Hannibal had continued shopping after taking a short break, consumed by thoughts of Will in his most vulnerable moments. There was an incredible sweetness to such a thing; Will could not describe the emotion more elegantly. Hannibal had not left him behind for eternity; Will had nothing to fear but the stray blade of a butcher's knife.

Reentering the kitchen, he found Hannibal where he had left him.

"You haven't moved."

Back turned, Hannibal pushed his hands to the side so Will could see their sound, "*Where else would I go?*"

A common phrase shared amongst them; Will's heart swelled tenfold. The fear that had plagued Hannibal's return dissipated, replaced in its entirety by comfort. The chill of the autumn air outside could not penetrate the walls of the house that held their hearts in its stomach. He would not hold Hannibal's abandonment against him, but would not allow him to forget.

Hannibal would not let him forget his own vow, one of forgiveness, even if he wanted to- Will would need to forgive Hannibal's abandonment.

The cannibal in question ushered Will to his side with a snap, and continued in hand their conversation that had started on foot.

"As to answer your question: I would prefer you don't ask where I've been," Hannibal signed with an exhale, gestures sharp at the edges in curt dismissal. He then lowered his gaze to the bag of groceries knocking against Will's leg, softening his hands with acquiescence, *"I'll bring you there later on."*

"Please do."

So Hannibal had been *there*- somewhere. He'd know, eventually; what bothered him was not where Hannibal had been, but the very fact. He'd have to wrestle the reasoning out of clenched fists, as he had grown accustomed to doing as of late; Hannibal did not offer his soft white underbelly freely when the air grew saturated with cold.

Will set the bag on the table, right in front of Hannibal. He hid the leash-wrapped hand away from the other's line of sight, and proceeded to pull out each item one by one- not to confront the man, but out of convenience; they could place the fruits of all their labor into one basket.

A familiar shape settled into Will's hands as he took it from its canvas shelter. He brought his observation to Hannibal's attention with a barely-concealed smile, "We bought the same shampoo."

"It has a pleasant scent, I must admit," Hannibal replied, barely letting the fact wash over them both as he continued, *"I also bought seeds, if it would interest you. A variety of herbs and more preferable edible plants for the garden, as well as hydrangeas for aesthetic beauty."*

These were the plants Hannibal had sworn to replace after spending a day uprooting the garden, away from all. Will pulled out what Hannibal had mentioned, all in order, the hydrangea seeds announcing their emergence with a pleasant rustling. The packaging was adorned with many different colors of flower, though the exact variety was not printed on the packet. Will brought this to Hannibal's attention, a string of unremarkable curiosity laced into the question, "What color did you get?"

Hannibal nodded, as if he had already prepared a speech for Will to absorb; he wondered if this was just the case as the man set off on a winding response.

"Hydrangeas are unique in the fact that their color is not determined by genetics, but by the environment. They become pink under basic conditions and blue under acidic conditions." He extended his hand, allowing Will to place the fragile container into his palm. Hannibal

ran his thumb over it as he drew his conclusion, leaving room after the sentence for Will to speak, "A prime example of nature versus nurture in a species other than humans."

The space Hannibal had left grew in size until it encased them both in a shell of silence. The world seemed to narrow its focus as Hannibal waited for a response, or no response at all- Will could only tell he was waiting. He could feel the man's eyes wandering over his form, noting how his skin pressed into the wood of the table where he leaned against it; would Hannibal liken it to a pale sculpture? Would he be waiting for sound in vain, for his mouth was still as marble? Will did not know himself, if his vocal cords would vibrate, until they trembled with speech.

"So behaviorism isn't a human construct after all."

Hannibal placed a finger to his lips, contemplating Will's words for a moment, before putting it back in motion, *"It is in name. But you are correct; its foundations can be found throughout almost all species- dogs, rodents, or even fowl. Basic psychology is relevant to any sentient creature, though man is exceptionally receptive to behavioral conditioning. This, I know from experience."*

Will's mind flooded with the possibility of Hannibal's intent; his words could ring true for the both of them. He remembered his cane- how it had belonged just to one, then to both, and now to the Schrödinger-esque state of liminality it found, discarded on the ground. Once a symbol of company for Hannibal, it had become a beast of burden; its click brought only the promise of weight. Unlike himself and therapies of old, Will could not deconstruct the stimuli that held Hannibal's nervous system in their grips; he held out the hope that one day, they would be exhumed.

Much was still buried beneath the brown earth and the ethereal brine; flowers could penetrate these layers, long lost to time. Will clung to the unborn hydrangeas still sleeping in their seed shelters, guiding Hannibal along their safe petals with conversation, "Would you call flowers sentient?"

"They can communicate; consider the mycelium network."

Will lifted his head in acknowledgement of lives past, eyes pointed upward. "You don't know how much I've considered it, Doctor Lecter," he sighed, enunciating the final words. He felt his mouth pulling at the bed of skin just beneath his eyes as he spoke; Will returned his hands to the table once more. He avoided Hannibal's gaze with purpose, shuffling through the bag and glancing at the man's hands in spare seconds and forming his own reply, "But I don't think they can beg you not to uproot their world."

"They will find the strength to heal under my guidance. The world of plants' capacity for connection is unmatched, even by mankind. It is much kinder than humanity; surrounding plants will send nutrients to the stump of a fallen tree, so that new sprouts grow."

Will saw Hannibal's eyes track his hands intently as they wrapped around a whiskey bottle- a brand that had frequented the musty cupboards of a long-forgotten Virginia house. Will could not help but smile, though the expression did not reach his eyes; they were more focused on following Hannibal's speaking fingers and his own wandering eyes.

The cannibal continued. "*You once longed for such an immediate, complete connection. Tell me, Will, have you found that connection from the axe that felled your brothers, or from the hand that planted your seeds?*"

"The same hand that carries the axe, plants and waters me," Will said, almost whispering as he set the whiskey bottle onto the table. It landed with an unavoidable thump, starting his next words, "But I am the consequence of my own actions. I hold the handle; you're the blade. You're the mycelium, and I'm the sprout."

"*You grow on your own; I am just the observer;*" Hannibal added. Will made to protest, opening his mouth to tell Hannibal just how omnipresent a force he was in his becoming, but his cries were quickly muffled by the man's hands, "*Are you not a product of conditioning?*"

Will raised an eyebrow, surprised, though expecting entirely, such a question. "Conditioning requires rewards and punishment. I've had my fair share of punishments doled out to me, but rewards have been-" he breathed in, out, "scarce."

"*Have they?*"

"Less now than before, unless you consider abandonment a reward," he sighed, finishing the sentence with a sharp breath in. Will finally revealed his hand with this final gasp of air, placing his palm softly on the table so the leash, and not the shaking weight of his hand, caught Hannibal's eye. This plan, unavoidably, did not come to fruition against the cannibal's hunger for flesh.

Hannibal took his hand, slipping a finger beneath the leather strip to loosen it, and unwrapped the leash. He then proceeded to run his thumb over the reddening marks left behind, firm grip catching the vibrations of fear that moved through thin finger-bones.

The contact ceased only for a fraction of a second as Hannibal signed, "*Nervous, Will?*"

He allowed his head a faint nod, accompanied only by a shiver. "I don't appreciate it when you hide your intentions."

Hannibal let go. "*I thought my intentions were on full display; I do not wish to cause you anxiety.*"

"A little too late for that," Will sighed, thinking back to the cold glass sunroom, deprived of its purpose under starlight that would not register past the eye's absolute threshold. Will rested his sight on Hannibal's hand, which now gripped the leather strip with such care, almost impossible in a hand so capable of violence. Hungry for more information, Will hid his plea for scraps under a demanding question, "A leash always comes with a collar- what else did you buy?"

"*I think you'll be very pleased.*"

Will smirked, head twitching as he blinked fast, "You can't predict me."

The particular weight of silence that sat in the room was not organic; it had a stilted, choked quality to its presence. Hannibal did not break it even as he signed, his movements cautious and calculated, fingers barely separating in motion, *"My room, please?"*

"It would be rude to deny you that, you know," Will observed with a gentle laugh. He received a toothed smile in response. For this, Will was grateful; levity had seeped back into their silence once more.

Animosity did not have the precious time to build between them after years of malignancy. Will no longer worried that it had gone into remission, only to return again; he knew that violence was no longer a means of separation, but of connection. Even all the hate and bitterness in the world could not survive being scorched by the flames of pure, human connection.

Will knelt to retrieve the cane, floor-bound at Hannibal's side. The descent translated into his mind's eye as sinking down, being pulled under until his toes tapped the ocean floor at Hannibal's feet. There was no sand to kick up- only carpet- but nevertheless, Will dug his fingers into the liquid-smooth surface. He raised his head in preparation to surface, only to be met by Hannibal's enraptured gaze.

"Will?"

A question, with more to come in its wake; Will made a sound to confirm that he'd heard it, muffled as it was in water.

"I will put our groceries away once you retire for the evening."

Another smile, small and of thanks, peeked out from beneath Will's lips. The water surrounding him filled his mouth as it widened, and filtered out through his teeth as he breached the surface at eye-level with Hannibal, "Sounds good."

The other man emptied his hands of the seeds and leash, handing him the bag. Will placed the cane firm upon the floor with a ringing click and slipped Hannibal's offering down to his elbow. He spread his fingers out in a fan, each individual finger its own beacon of connection, and coaxed, "Come on, I'll sit you on your bed."

They set off once more, this time without much trouble besides the unsteadiness of Hannibal's path. The man kept casting sideways glances towards the bag that swung by Will's hip; a single, precious item was of interest. It swung, back and forth, constant, until Will let Hannibal's weight drop heavy onto the blue bedsheets. The fabric of the bed caved, wrinkling to support the man, its hills bearing sky-blue highlights and its valleys holding navy shadows; a soft, smooth ocean.

It seemed the excitement of discovery and opportunity had pulled Sordino out of Hannibal's immediate awareness. It felt unlike Hannibal, to not wallow in his pain, but perhaps he had already wallowed enough alone; room could be made for temporary pleasures.

Will himself remained standing. He draped the leash across his palm and brought it to Hannibal's face, voice walking the line between a trifecta of bite, blush, and disbelief, "What

do you intend to do with this?"

"I purchased two additional leather collars. One bears roses along its length, and the other is lined with fur; each has an engraving."

Will furrowed his brow, voice slipping from its even path to a tremble, "One for you, one for me?"

"Even steven."

He looked down at the leash- brown, unextraordinary, and useless without another as its guide. There was a beauty to something that could not yet fulfill its purpose; opportunity was infused into the very threads that kept it together. Hannibal had likely seen such potential, and acted upon it- a symbol of the past.

"Is this a rare instance of an impulse purchase?" Will's eyes met the bottoms of his eyelids, looking at the cannibal through lowered lashes.

Hannibal's expression turned cold. He blinked, two-time flutters in rapid succession, in offense, *"Much thought went into buying them. All of the items will fit your size perfectly, and have materials up to my standards."*

Will took the leash from his palm and held it out in front of him, stretching it to its full length. "This one isn't fitted, though."

"A preparatory measure. I was not sure if you would appreciate the material or the very idea of such a thing. It is a merging of organic matter and manmade metal- something the human mind and body must take time to get accustomed to."

"You could say the same thing about a leather handbag," he retorted, throwing the flailing strip towards Hannibal, who caught it effortlessly with a clap.

"There is meaning behind this, Will, but it is only a leather lead; the collars I ordered will take longer to arrive. We will return both, if need be, but do give them a chance."

A hint of desperation echoed through and around Hannibal's hands, which shook with the subtlety of a nestling reaching towards its mother's beak and trying not to drop its head. Will's surprise broke from Hannibal's effort, softening his tongue, if only momentarily, "You really want this, don't you?"

Hannibal's eyes bore holes into Will's skull; this was the truth.

"You want things to be easy- kept on a tight leash."

"Keeping my manipulations from being revealed years ago was not an easy task, Will."

"You want things to be easy with me, so that I accept anything you do," Will sang, voice sweet as he crept towards Hannibal with easy, yet increasingly heavier, firmer, steps. "But you know that can't happen."

"I know you will fight it," Hannibal confessed, looking up at Will with admiration as the men drew closer and closer together.

"Then why?" Will felt his breath bounce back towards himself from their proximity, warm and heavy as his heart grew restless.

"We can be performers on a stage, birthing the script and stage directions for an opera of our own creation. We can be gods, rewriting history itself."

He tilted his head, letting an electricity-rich impulse of amusement crawl through his throat. Hannibal wanted to remember, to recreate; Will let awe seep into his words, hushed and thoughtful in their uncomplicated delivery, "You want to play pretend."

Hannibal closed his eyes. Will could see the creases along their lids, how each fold slid away from the slope of his cloaked eyeballs; it was such a gentle curve, elegantly framing the harsh dip of his sockets. He could almost see the threads of thought tangling and twisting in Hannibal's mind- a longing for the past, a need to keep his claws sharp, the urge to hold and to love- all of it, suspended in webs that formed the woven, knot-ridden drapes of his mind-cathedral windows.

The cannibal's eyes opened silently; the sudden burst of red-marbled white startled Will. His own eyes fell to Hannibal's hands, now shuffling with barely suppressed fervor, *"I want to see what you will do, if I tell you to sit in front of me and talk about your day."* He paused, adding, *"Make yourself comfortable."*

Will hesitated for not a brief moment before turning his back to Hannibal, looking for a chair. Finding none nearby, he lowered himself to the floor, carefully placing his limbs in their respective positions, as if in supplication. From this perspective, the tapestry in Hannibal's room framed the man's form immaculately; the pomegranate tree seemed skin-tight, clinging to him with the devotion of a hand-painted halo. Its fruits dripped their bloody sweetness onto the cannibal's head, trickling down his glowing skin like the blood drawn forth by a crown of thorns. Doctor Lecter, Hannibal, his beloved, the cannibal, opened its mouth to greet Will. He could only watch in awestruck wonder as the cannibal let a single, perfect droplet spiral down a pointed canine and into its maw.

Chapter End Notes

I completely forgot when i posted the last chapter and kept thinking i'll be hitting three weeks last week so this one's been in the works for a while!

Eventually I will be making at least one piece of art for this fic. I am a man of my word, and will 1) finish this lovely little (not so little) monstrosity 2) make art

This chapter will be an early holiday gift for everybody, then! hopefully i will also have another chapter done by the time the calendar new year rolls around :) also to any who celebrate this month of the year, happy holidays! If any of you celebrate Yule (hello like me), then blessed be!

Regressus

Chapter Summary

"The stray returns to the one man who gave him meat, and calls him 'master'."

"Who's the master, and who's the stray?"

"Predict, my clever Will. Who calls, and who comes running?"

Chapter Notes

i have no words for this. 10k of sucking and fucking. happy new year.
felt i had to add a note in the beginning as a warning so everyone knows what hell
they're getting into oops

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Hello, Will."

"Doctor Lecter."

The blue curtains by the windows turned striped with blood. The ceiling grew in height, gaining a balcony floor and a book-filled lining. The room grew, expanding, filling with air until its corners bloomed with shadow; Will was sitting in Hannibal's office, one of two people orbiting each other in its center.

These words, these spaces, were so familiar- so known and so comforting that Will's palms grew damp in automatic response to their conception. He remembered evenings of turmoil and terror, of serenity and satisfaction, all led by Hannibal's encouraging hand; Will welcomed it all with open arms.

"Tell me, dearest Will, what visions plague your troubled mind today?"

The scene and all its dialogue- a play from imagination. While reminiscent of another time, it bore only a superficial resemblance to its references. Hannibal did not continue to speak; only his hands made conversation. Will's name had been bestowed the ornamentation of "dearest,"; something that ran free only after their fall. There was a familiarity to the interaction that held echoes of the past, but was shaped by new knowledge and experience- a performance revealed to be but a raw rehearsal from memory.

Will could play with Hannibal's vulnerability; if he gave in to what Hannibal asked, he would receive the truth in return. He could pretend this bedroom was the abandoned office. He could pretend they spoke as acquaintances. He could not pretend that they had moved backward through time; Will would ask what could rarely be asked outright, even in therapy. If this was the only means of tearing apart Hannibal's person suit, attached to the bone by a single, sinewy thread of muscle, so be it.

"I was wondering if-" Will started, voice faltering at its first utterance, "if I would see you again." He met Hannibal's eyes, squinting his own with interrogative intensity, "I've never seen you run."

Hannibal looked away in thought, pulling memories out of the air. *"I did leave you on my kitchen floor once. I fled the scene."*

"You left more than me; you had so many other people to run from, then. Now you only have me," Will stated coolly, keeping the bitterness that bubbled up in his stomach from falling into his mouth.

Hannibal felt this resentment and immediately went to mend the wound. *"My intent was not to leave you but to de-escalate the situation. Sordino was the sole problem."*

The edges of Will's eyes began their terrible sting, announcing the arrival of tears. He looked up at Hannibal, knowing his irises would glow like crystals beneath the soft light of the bedroom. He spoke softly, voice cracking into a whisper-like falsetto, "Think about me; don't worry about me. That's what you did."

Will's throat tightened, turning his voice coarse and pushing away the lightness of fresh tears, thrusting them into the dark brine. Muscles spasmed and relaxed, pulling up thick, tear-heavy mucus that Will fought to keep inside; he cleared it with a bitter laugh, "Leave me behind, spilled wine, shouting pig and all."

"Correct."

He continued choking past his own flesh, will to keep his volume even steadily diminishing by the second, "Do you know what that feels like? To be left in the past? To wait?" His voice quieted to barely a whisper, the only trace of sound lingering on the sharp end of 'wait'.

"Far too intimately."

Will resented Hannibal, in this moment.

The cannibal was emotionless, silent and still as a statue. His hands no longer shook, and his lips no longer quivered.

The room lost its familiar colors, filling with light and fading from harsh red to deep navy. No longer were they in Hannibal's office, but in his bedroom- much warmer than what had once surrounded them. For this, Will was grateful; delusion could only live between them as long as they fed it with the lie of mutual separation.

Although glimmers of honesty shone through Hannibal, reactive as a bundle of nerves, its jumps and impulses had no mercy upon Will; they fled from one man to the other, and all Will could feel was the controlled disappearance of a knife under his skin, smelted from scraps of relief and regret. He scrambled for more words, mind flinging them all at Hannibal like the seafoam-spitting ocean on white-hot metal, "I know you do. Just-" he paused, coughing away the heaviness of tears, "act on that feeling."

Will looked left, right, buying time to blink away water, though he could not shed the weight of Hannibal's gaze. When the emotional torrent passed, sooner than anticipated, he returned to Hannibal's face, finding a single tear rolling into the pit of Hannibal's cheek.

Will took a ragged breath in.

Both their hearts were still burning and raw, as they had been years ago. The stability Hannibal now provided softened Will's, though the muscle was not ashamed to show itself to the world. Will didn't truly resent Hannibal; he'd just been quick to feel, his heart poised for defense. Hannibal was only a man in the shape of a monster; he felt, cried, loved like any man- if that man was the physical manifestation of the entire human emotional consciousness. Will could not forget just how tightly Hannibal held his own heart flush to his chest, only to watch hopelessly as its contents spilled out of his arms like a thousand Dionysian grapes-turned-wine.

Steadying and softening himself in response to Hannibal's tears, Will reworked his words. "Gravity and time aren't our enemies anymore. You're not behind bars." He rose to his knees, forcing his body to remain pliant and placing his hands on his thighs. Hannibal had done the same the night before in the bath attempting to soothe Will; he hoped the man would notice his attempts to interweave reason and comfort with the weight of his bones. "We're together. You're free."

Will ended his sentence with one hand lifted into the air, palm up, ready to receive whatever gifts of language Hannibal would give him.

The man took in this shift in position, eyes chasing Will's legs as they hid beneath his torso. "*Were gravity and time our enemies before? Every decision, given a second longer to be made, can still be undone.*"

"Time can't be reversed, and teacups never come back together."

Will looked on as Hannibal realized his fault, turning away. "*No. They do not.*" Eyes averted, he argued, "*Some theorize intention can alter the course of cosmic events. Would you have hesitated to throw us into the sea if you knew I would go willingly?*"

"I-" Will swallowed, admitting to Hannibal what he could not say when gutted on the kitchen floor, "I would've never warned you if I wanted to take your life against your will."

Realization dawned upon Hannibal, widening his eyes and gently stamping a faint smile onto his lips. "*To embrace your becoming fully before bringing death upon us both, knowing I would follow your every word; that was your warning?*"

"I would've killed you if you fought back. Would you expect any less of your loyal creation?" Will said with an exaggerated bow of the head and flick of the wrist, giving due respect to his creator in irony.

"*Beautiful*," Hannibal signed, mouth soundlessly mimicking the truth Will had once spoken in warning, in confirmation- in true acceptance. He continued, almost chiding, though the weight of Will's words did not fall on deaf ears. "*How indecisive you are, Will. Given any warp in fate and circumstance, I could not have changed my mind.*"

This, they both knew to be from a time without Hannibal's god-sent plague of regrets; Will harkened back to his own. "Maybe you would've, with just one extra minute." He gave a pained smile, "Who knows- maybe the world would've taken our souls sooner."

"*The Devil only takes when the time comes. He does not listen to our begging; he is married, devoted eternally, to time.*"

Will nodded contemplatively. To speak of teacups and time once more was to bring the past forward; Will could not tell if this was the performance Hannibal had been alluding to. He knew the man wanted to dwell on the past, reform it, and mold it into their new circumstances, but he needed Will to follow; both knew he would come when called. First, though, he needed to know the sound of the call that would one day so perfectly sit in the shell of his ear; he would wring its melody out of Hannibal's throat with a show of desperate emotion.

Will's head fell and rose with soaring intent, hiding and revealing his shining eyes in a calculated pattern as he spoke, "But we don't have to beg him for more time. We can talk. We can think. We aren't in danger." Will finished with this final, hope-filled plea- a plea of understanding.

His cry did not elicit sympathy from Hannibal; the man moved ever-forward, barreling forth with heavy hands, "*You say I am free even now, unable to walk, unable to talk?*"

Will felt his hope fall, a dove released only to find its wings had been clipped.

Some bitterness towards his physical limitations still resided in Hannibal's mind- or was it that of the layman? Will recalled Hannibal hiding behind a veil of normalcy, framing his emotions in predictable ways; had the man not said he truly held no shame towards his muteness, only fascination? Perhaps this sudden descent into resentment was only an attempt to hear Will's strangled protests for longer, savoring his weakening lungs and tear-streaked throat.

"Are those your words or mine?"

Hannibal tilted his head with satisfaction. "*That is what you may think I feel. A clever boy you are for seeing through them.*" He licked his lips and took in a breath as if preparing to talk; Will tracked his tongue as it skated over his mouth's smooth surface. All this energy, so concentrated in Hannibal's throat, still traveled to his hands as he signed, "*I don't hold any more control over your emotions than you do yourself. Though I will say, your distress distresses me- no matter how tragically stunning the tears.*"

The dove flew once more on crafted wings, higher, towards the sun- or rather, towards the glowing lamp above Hannibal's head. Joy, luminous again, filled the cracks in Will's voice as he strained to speak over the glow, "What do you really feel, Hannibal?"

The waves of conversation they had been riding on had finally reached their climax, a swirling pool of golden affection, falling hope, and the simple transparency of honesty. Will could see it now, wiping dark red pomegranate stains from Hannibal's skin, instead filling its wrinkles with gold and darkening their sweat-slick sheen with smooth navy. His eyes, opaque in all their movements, now sat drained of their viscera and replaced with vessels of clear, saltwater tears.

Hannibal seemed less a monster in this light, even less a man; he was the earth, the universe, and the divine cosmos combined. Where before stood a being of emotion, now sat a creature of incomprehensibility- and mere seconds later, held itself firm in its shifting colors as an ever-changing soul. He was Will's love in all its ferocious, impermanent, intangible beauty. That is all he was, in the sea, in the end- love itself.

Hannibal confessed.

"I feel sorry for leaving you alone; I can assume it was not a pleasant experience for you."

Will's body shook, his heart vibrating in his chest in frantic confirmation of Hannibal's words. Empathy had finally made itself known to them both, to Hannibal, undeniably so. The dove's wings caught fire, though they did not burn; the bird filled with firelight, ready to bestow it upon the eager tongue of the man who needed to hear its message most.

"Never run from me. Unless-" Will's eyes darted across the room, sending the mind-born dove off to set the cannibal's flesh before him aflame, "Unless I know you will. And I know you'll come back. But unless you tell me-" he stole a single breath more to dig into the cannibal's soft points, piling phrase upon phrase, "I won't know you as I know myself. You won't get my attention, and we'll both be alone."

Finally, with fire and sweetness, Hannibal lowered his head in understanding, leaning forward to near Will's height. *"We are both alone, without each other."*

"You want to know every rotation of my mental axis, even what you cannot predict; that is a great feat, and one I admire. But know, I will not leave you permanently; this I promise."

Will continued to shake, subtly, but hard enough to send strands of dark hair falling into his eyes and mouth. The force of his voice was not strong enough to push them out as it rose with trembling question, "You promise?"

"I do."

He stared into the perfectly wet, spherical surface of Hannibal's eyes, glistening with disappearing tears. The most torturous times had passed; here lay the opportunity for honesty. "I don't know why I'm so afraid."

"Even I was unsure, in flight. I felt I could run forever;" Hannibal sighed, placing his hand around Will's cheek to cup it with his warm, coarse palm. "*Alas, we are human.*"

Will mourned the loss of touch as Hannibal momentarily removed his hand to finish his sentence, though immediately rejoiced in the return of warmth. He took a close-eyed moment of pleasure to let the other man's heat pass through his cheek, past his teeth, and seep into his tongue. He maneuvered his tongue to press into the flesh of his cheek, and through it, into Hannibal's skin. He felt the depression where the palm dipped in its center, and the hills where mounds of flesh rose from their foundations to give way to fingers. This was the architecture, the very skeleton of his lover's hand, tangible through layers upon layers of blood and skin; even in delirium, Will would know its form.

He lifted his own hand and placed it over Hannibal's, taking in the notches of his knuckles as his tongue felt their underside. Hannibal didn't speak; he let Will embrace the simple pleasure of knowing another through touch and tongue alone.

Will, however grateful for such an opportunity, could not part with the sight of Hannibal's face for long; he opened his eyes to the other's fond gaze, spilling over with adoration and a glimmer of question.

Hannibal's confusion brought a knowing smile to Will's face; his actions hadn't been predicted in full. "What do you see?"

Hannibal's hand slid across the surface of Will's cheek as he spoke, slipping into the gap between his upper and lower teeth before reclaiming its place on steady skin.

"*Instinctual hedonism.*"

Just as Hannibal finished the sign, Will grabbed his hand, sandwiching it between his palms. Using Hannibal's trapped arm as leverage, he rose to his feet, knees clicking with the effort. Hannibal, surprisingly, let his hand be suspended in midair; it lay in the curved shelter of Will's embrace, waiting for whatever the other would impart upon him. Hannibal looked up at him with the same affection as before, full of awe; Will felt himself a deity adored by the most beautiful, powerful creature known to planet Earth.

"Are you really just a man in front of me, here, or a beast?" Will asked, knowing the answer; there was not a universe in which these lines did not blur, as the threads of mutual love cannot be disentangled.

Hannibal's fingers moved inside the cave of Will's hands; they combined with his other free digits to complete his words. Will saw them in his mind's eye, phantoms of speech brought to life by touch and sight, "*The stray returns to the one man who gave him meat, and calls him 'master'.*"

To find nourishment at the sight of him, or eventual beauty in consumption- which line was his, and which Hannibal's?

"Who's the master, and who's the stray?" Will purred, voice leaking confidence, brows furrowing in false confusion; he would tease Hannibal into laying his thoughts bare.

Much to Will's surprise, the man lowered his lips, pressing them to Will's hand that still clasped his own tight; Will released it at the sudden bloom of heat, yielding. He cradled the love-smothered hand close to his chest, as if injured; Hannibal's invisible teeth had latched onto its translucent, vein-braided flesh, and would not let go.

Hannibal could now speak unimpeded. He flexed his fingers slowly, letting each joint extend to its full length before he spoke, "*Predict, my clever Will. When we are afraid, who cowers, and who bares his teeth?*"

Will moved towards the other, placing his feet onto the carpet soundlessly. The plush ground absorbed his footsteps and caved beneath his weight; Will heard the gentle springing of its fibres back into place as he lifted his feet, toes scraping against the soft surface.

Hannibal continued speaking. His posture remained rigid, and he did not back away from Will's towering form.

"Who calls, and who comes running?"

Will drew in until he could go no farther. His knees hit the edge of the bed, legs wrapping around Hannibal's own, which hung limply over the bedside. He pressed on, bringing himself to the precipice of a complete merging of bodies. He brought both hands to the exposed column of Hannibal's neck, squeezing only slightly against his pulse, and pulled the man forward until they could smother themselves in the border between hair and skin.

"Do you want to keep playing pretend, Doctor Lecter?" he whispered, teeth in dangerous proximity to the vulnerable cartilage of the man's ear.

Hannibal swallowed, then answered with a barely-audible separation of lips, "No."

Will blew a soft stream of air into Hannibal's ear, bringing forth a shiver that passed between them both- one of simple physiology, the other of psychological hunger- both rooted in the line between instinct and intellect. Hannibal reacted with a twitch and a slow closing of the eyes; such power lay in these quiet movements, such ferocity, that neither man could deny it.

"You're just as human as me, Hannibal." Will pulled away from the cannibal's neck, careful not to rest his weight on the other's lap. Instead, he placed his knee on the bed, tilting Hannibal's immovable body backward. He wrapped his arm around Hannibal's back in one fluid swoop, keeping him upright until the command came to release him, sword-sharp, onto the taught thread of restraint that lay against the sheets.

Hannibal managed to squeeze his arms into the space where air still survived between the heat of their bodies, abdomen stiffening with the effort of not falling backward. "*That doesn't answer your own question; are we man or beast?*"

"Doesn't matter."

Will withdrew his arm from Hannibal's back and watched him fall to the bed. His hair lifted under the wind of descent as his arms scrambled for balance, compensating for the

spinelessness of their host. The cannibal managed to prop himself up on his elbows, though quickly acquiesced, falling beneath the dark, blazing beauty above him.

A dark shadow fell over Hannibal's face. Will admired the darkness of his own shadow that cloaked Hannibal in black, blocking out the lamp above them- how it fully encircled Hannibal's supine form, leaving only a single shining star of light in the black void of his eyes. Hunger, not fear, was written in Hannibal's darkening pupils and fanged grin; this- Will taking and understanding all he wanted to give- was the Eden he had built for them both.

Will smiled back, admiring how easily Hannibal allowed himself to be read. He lowered himself to the man's lips, took them between his teeth, and kissed him.

While not methodically, Will let their contact linger, taking in the sheer divinity of such a thing. He hadn't taken the time to truly immerse himself in the sensation of a kiss before; he'd only consumed its passion in a frenzy, absorbing all its heat and want in an instant. He let the subtle ache of skin as it stretched fill his body. He let the temperature of their mouths shift against air and heat. He let it happen without need, without an agenda, for the pure celebration of existence.

As he pulled away from Hannibal, he felt the saliva around his mouth evaporating against the cool air of the bedroom; such were the transient fruits of a lover's embrace. Hannibal raised a hand and passed it across the still-slick velvet of Will's lips. He played with the entrance, slipping his thumb in and out of his mouth in fascination. Will followed his eyes, noting how they twitched to the side watching the finger dissolve and reappear- such delicate movements for such overwhelming captivation. Will took Hannibal's finger onto his tongue with an eager lick at its tip; he encircled it once, twice, and eased it out with a gentle nip to the soft pad of fingertip-flesh. Hannibal pulled it back to inspect the reddening spot, removing the digit with a quiet pop.

Will's mouth hung open as he breathed, lips slightly swollen from incessant attention. They quickly filled with words once more, tongue adjusting to the empty space left by Hannibal's finger.

"I think you want to make me an animal," he growled, riding the wave of an exhale.

Hannibal tilted his head. *"Did you not just admit to being one?"*

The cannibal's chest heaved in Will's line of sight. Each breath, each catch and release of air, brought his beating heart closer to Will's jaws; he fought the urge to slip his hand under the man's shirt and press his fingers between the intercostal spaces, prying them apart and holding up the beast's hammering heart in victory.

Will ran his hand over Hannibal's chest, letting its fingers sit between the dip of his ribs, rising and falling like ocean waves. "This is different; more literal than the becoming you gave me," he mused, absentmindedly tracing the landscape of flesh and bone. "You don't want my pretend therapy, and you don't want my wit or words. You don't even want me to kill for you; you want to play with my mind again."

Will punctuated the end of his list with a press of his thumb into Hannibal's breastbone, slipping it down towards the bottom of his rib cage and bringing out a small gasp from the man below.

"Play?"

Will snapped his head back and forth with each phrase as he continued, following the ferociously thumping artery beneath the pad of his thumb. "Push me into the unknown, pretending it's familiar. Drag me around and watch me follow. Throw a ball and watch me tear it apart with my teeth. Give me a slab of meat, and watch me **maul it**."

Will rounded out the last syllable, letting its connotation sit heavy in the air. With this pause in his sermon, he pushed his finger onto the singular blood vessel that ran through Hannibal's stomach; it pumped beneath his hand, thrusting his finger upwards with its sheer determination to keep beating.

Hannibal brought his hand over Will's, feeling the vibration of his own heartbeat through Will's bones. Will let the crashing waves of sound echo and fade before releasing the vessel, raising his hands to mimic the other man, "Play."

Hannibal's mouth fell open and quickly shut, betraying a momentary lapse in conscientiousness.

"*My beautiful, wonderful, divine Will,*" he signed, hands starting shaky but quickly finding their footing, "*It never ceases to fascinate me how well you know me- and through extension, yourself- yet you flee giving in to my touch. You are running from your own pleasure.*"

Will furrowed his brow in disbelief. "I'm not running; I'm taking my time. You let me crawl right into the belly of the beast, and I need to test its give under my knife." He dragged a single fingernail across Hannibal's nipple, its heat transferring to his nail bed, "You're just impatient and want to do it yourself."

Hannibal shivered at Will's touch, chest rising to chase its assailant; it fell with an exhale of resignation. "*All I want is to see you embrace not only its beauty from afar, but to bathe in its glory- with my aid, of course.*"

Before Will could register the blur disappearing behind his eyes, Hannibal took Will's head in his hands. He pushed him down, stripping him of all agency and bringing him face to face with the aforementioned pit of the beast's stomach. Will's nose sat flush against the skin, wrinkling ever-so-slightly with each new beat of Hannibal's pulse. His tongue lay shaking, jerking against the salty surface in wait. He could not see much except for the all-encompassing, grey-beige warmth of soft hair and exposed flesh; the one abnormality he could make out was the raised scar of a dragon-borne bullet wound. Helpless to his situation, Will let his tongue glide over the scar in search of solid ground.

Hannibal snapped his fingers, pulling Will's attention toward his hands. Will felt his eyes roll up to see, searching past the bunched folds of Hannibal's shirt to latch onto his hands. "Let instinct run rampant through the black woods of your mind, and let rivers of hedonism feed well the land."

Will's voice echoed back against the flat plane of Hannibal's abdomen, reaching the other man's ears low and muffled, "Let me go."

With the release of his voice came the condensation of hot air. Will attempted to pull his head back to escape the moisture that settled on his damp skin but was kept in place by a hand firm on his neck. He twitched; the hand's grip did not give. Something akin to panic began its angry pacing around Will's mind, setting his lashes to fluttering and his heart to racing. He knew he could fight the force of one hand with great ease, but something urged him not to, fearing pain. As deep-seated as this fear was, the hand didn't bring any physical violence to Will's body; its warmth surrounded his brainstem, feeding it comfort and constriction all at once.

Will recognized this as the easy, terrifying descent into blurry pleasure. How simple, how glorious it would be to follow the hand's lead, yet- the hairs on the back of his neck stood appalled at the very thought.

Will's tongue still kept its bearings; he opened his mouth to set a trap with a bargain as bait. His jaws widened like a snake's, waiting for a starving rodent to wander in as he let out a second huff of protest, "Let me go, and you'll see me run free in the wild. Just like you want."

Hannibal released his grip to speak- not to heed Will's request. Will felt the hands pass through his hair, running through it without even a lingering caress; he leaned into the fleeting touch.

A second passed between this touch and Hannibal's words, a second of freedom, yet Will did not move. He hadn't realized the extent of his freedom; he only waited for the other to speak.

Hannibal's solid fingers then appeared through the ruffled bangs that hung before his eyes. *"Wouldn't it be much more appealing if I kept you in captivity?"*

With those confining words breaking his stillness, Will struck.

He licked Hannibal's stomach with the flat of his tongue, slowly, letting the hairs that dusted it settle until they disappeared across the border of a scar. He savored the taste- salty, a hint of cotton fabric- and bit down.

Hannibal barely flinched. He sucked in his stomach to escape the dull pain- a product of reflex- and threw his hands to Will's curls. The muscles of Will's neck strained as Hannibal lifted his head up by the scalp, the rest of his weight dangling useless behind him. Will licked his dry lips with unease at the sudden force, finding he couldn't taste blood; the scars hadn't regained all the prior glory of untouched skin. Will had only given Hannibal a warning sign, free of permanent damage; the scar did not bleed, and its nerves did not fire. Still, its violence was not lost on the pair.

The cannibal smiled. "How easily force and confinement bring out your teeth." He slid his finger between Will's lips, pressing it against a pointed canine as he whispered, "See?"

Will felt the frantic vibration of skin against skin as his lips trembled by Hannibal's finger. He pawed at the claws that held him in place, pleading to be released; Hannibal let go without hesitation.

He rose steadily, leaning back on his haunches to look down at Hannibal as he spoke between deep, self-soothing breaths, "You want to see me completely uninhibited. And when you have me that way, you know it won't last long. I've done the exact same thing- carried you when you didn't need it, loved you when you couldn't refuse." Will sighed. "I can't deny you that. But I can refuse."

The glowing flush of Hannibal's face, vibrant just seconds earlier, disappeared into an unreadable white. *"Then refuse. I will not stop you."*

"No-" Will shook his head, placing his hands on the twin slopes of Hannibal's chest in frustration. "All you have to do is ask. Tell me if you'll run, tell me if you'll cage me, tell me if you'll kiss or kill me. Ask me, and I'll say yes," he pleaded, voice rising in a desperate whine. Hannibal looked on as Will rubbed his hands over his chest, giving some semblance of assurance through touch, "I promise."

"How many promises can we make in one day?"

"Married couples write pages and pages of vows."

Hannibal shifted beneath Will's gaze, pulling the man's wrists from his chest and sitting up. *"Then let us write novels."*

Both men were finally at eye-level with each other. Will's legs, tangled in Hannibal's outstretched ones, shuffled closer so their foreheads could meet.

"Will you do the honor of making another?"

Their eyes fell to the chasm beneath their heads where their hands hovered, intertwined. *"Will you let yourself go for me, Will?"*

Will nodded in confirmation instantly, but paused in thought. He closed his eyes, recalling how quickly the feeling of bliss overcame him- how uncontrollable it was, how easily Hannibal could bring him to that point. It was overwhelmingly peaceful; such was its horror. From under the blanket of closed lids, he whispered, "I just don't want to drown in it."

Hannibal brought his hand back to Will's cheek, where he allowed him the time to let his tongue explore once more as he formed his words. "I promised I would let you have me. I love it. I want it. But-"

"Too much life, too much love," Hannibal replied, finishing the stilted sentence. He looked away, eyes darting around as if arranging objects in space, and returned to Will with a proposition. *"Do you want my guidance, my absence, or my empathy?"*

"Guidance and empathy. I'll let you be the one who holds the leash, as long as it stays as attached to you as it does to me. As long as you don't let me go and don't push, I won't tug."

Will bent his neck to reveal its nape, where Hannibal's hand had rested in force just minutes prior. To redefine the established and establish new definitions; this was Will's intent. "Those are my constants, and you know that."

"I should simply let you interact with the environment at your own pace, then? Nudge you in the appropriate direction when necessary?"

Will nodded, then dipped his head to urge Hannibal's hand back to his neck.

"As you wish," the cannibal whispered, one last expression of speech before both he set his teeth to Will's throat. Out the corner of his eye, Will could see Hannibal hovering over his neck, a predator waiting to strike.

"I wonder if you will flinch."

Will did not answer, for he did not know.

Hannibal disappeared into his blind spot, leaving Will with solely the heat of his breath to visualize. The cloud dispersed and was quickly replaced by something sharper, accompanied by the burning, moving warmth of tongue. Hannibal sucked; Will twitched with slight discomfort at the sensation of his skin falling into meat-starved jaws.

When Hannibal released him, Will asked with surprise, "No blood?"

"Your neck needs to remain unharmed if it is to bear a collar. I have to exercise caution."

"You have to be gentle," Will crooned, eyes softening with the hope that Hannibal's words were not just related to the collar, but to his request for time. With some playfulness, Will added, "You bite a lot."

He took Hannibal's hand into his, pressing on its fingertips to watch the bloodflow cower in fear only to return to its home like sun-starved flowers. Will watched, mesmerized, until Hannibal's finger twitched.

"And you do not?"

Will brought the finger to his lips, enveloping its sensitive tip in a kiss. He let it fall against his teeth as he spoke, barely-audible words tangible only through touch, "Not always."

With only this sentence to precede the act, Will took the entire digit into his mouth, biting down until he could feel bone. The skin lay nestled in the grooves of his molars, where pointed teeth could do no harm; when Hannibal wriggled his finger in an attempt to free it, he only slipped nearer to fanged death. Will worked his mouth to pull him in, to keep the skin from breaking, only to find Hannibal shaking himself loose. As Hannibal struggled, Will regarded his foolishness- the messy ruffling of his hair as he fought to hold the man's finger, the subtle growl of frustration that escaped his throat, the curling of his hands into tight fists; all of it made him an opponent that should not appeal to Hannibal's tastes. Still, when he looked into the cannibal's eyes, all he could see was joy.

Will closed his eyes to push his visual awareness away. He directed his attention to the writhing hand in his mouth that pulled his very teeth from their gums with its strength. Will paused, giving it an appreciative lick, and let Hannibal end the battle. As a parting gift, he gave a final jaw-snap to grab anything left behind, closing them on nothing but air.

Not yet defeated, he looked up at Hannibal to prove his point, "At least I give some kind of warning; you're just merciless."

The cannibal stared at him with burning curiosity. "You fight almost like a newborn pup, suckling at the teat before its fangs shoot through its gums- though that does not make you any less dangerous," Hannibal admitted. "I, on the other hand, am only sheathing my claws for the time being."

"Is that what I am to you? A puppy?" Will spat out the word, its lightness foreign and easily leaving his tongue.

"If you allow me to place you in that category," Hannibal challenged.

"If you allow me," Will repeated, trailing off into darkening silence.

The challenge hung heavy in the dimly-lit room. Will sensed Hannibal's eyes locking in on his, filling with anticipation for his next move. Just as Will lunged for Hannibal's throat, the cannibal tensed, prepared for the attack from observation. Will's fangs blurred into a smile; the performance and all of its stage directions were fluid, as if planned in advance, and they could act it out in perfect harmony.

Hannibal raised his forearm to strike Will's open mouth, shielding himself and giving Will something to cling to. Will latched onto it readily, though didn't give himself time to fall into the lull of soft skin and steady hands. He pinned the attacking arm to the man's chest, draped his wrist over the other, and spread his full weight over Hannibal's body to bring them both crashing down to the mattress again.

Hannibal's eyes glowed with pride. "Good boy, Will. A handsome display of power."

"What're you gonna do with it?" he grunted with exertion, face buried in the crook of Hannibal's neck and nosing the collar of his shirt. His fingers blindly tugged at its buttons, their unrelenting force wrinkling the fabric until Hannibal came to their aid. As the cannibal shed his sheepskin, Will spoke between hot, hungry breaths, "Will you tame it?" another breath, "Bring it out?"

"Neither; I want to watch it howl."

"Then you know I'm not just some inexperienced pup," Will murmured, head hanging over the other man with confidence. "I'm a loyal, baying bloodhound."

Hannibal nodded. "A pup knows to come running; the hound knows why," he whispered, lifting his lips towards Will, who met Hannibal in a kiss; the cannibal greeted him with a bite. Will yelped, quickly quieted by Hannibal's laugh, "But your affinity for tongue and teeth betrays your playfulness."

"It's not that different from yours," Will whined back, licking his wound. He leaned back to strip naked, though quickly lowered himself to meet the warmth of Hannibal's skin. He let his weight rest against the man's body, feeling the friction of skin against skin as he pulled himself down, down towards Hannibal's feet. Will tracked the dips of his hands and feet on the sheets as his weight distributed itself evenly across his four limbs, until he reached the slope of Hannibal's crotch. He couldn't deny Hannibal's accusations of play; he would immerse himself in them.

Will pulled off the man's pants with force, their tough fabric folding harshly against his eager fingers. Hannibal rested his head on the wall, looking down on him through lowered lids. Will flew to him for words of encouragement, or perhaps a reprimand, but was only gifted silent curiosity.

Will continued, hooking his fingers below the rim of Hannibal's underwear and lifting it to reveal his cock. He immediately pressed his nose to the thick, wiry hair above it, bathing in the all-consuming smell of sweat and sex that belonged only to Hannibal. It surrounded him, crawling up his nose, into his brain, down his lungs, into his stomach, through his blood, and into the very marrow of his bones. He swallowed from the sheer overwhelm.

Hannibal's cock pressed against his throat, bobbing in time with his Adam's apple. The man's thighs grazed the sides of his head, pressing his shoulders and holding him tight in their grasp. Hannibal was in the very air he breathed, in every groove of his fingertips, closing off his throat and filling up his nose; Will gasped for breath.

Two thick shapes entered his line of sight. He focused his vision, blurred from ecstasy, to the form of Hannibal's fingers. The man held his hand up by his face, the sign "*up*" covering open lips.

"To avoid problems if I am unable to speak, I will give commands in sign. It will also work to your advantage if you are in a state of mind that interferes with your ability to produce and understand speech. I'm sure you will learn and remember them well; vision is the sense we are most receptive to, after all."

Will lifted his head incrementally, frowning at Hannibal's interference with his course of action, "Not smell? That's the best way to trigger memories and behaviors." As he spoke, the steady pressure of Hannibal's cock against his neck grew, gaining rhythm. Will ended his sentence with a soft hum of surprise at the sensation and watched as Hannibal's hips rutted against his throat in response.

Hannibal seemingly ignored the state of his own body, the only thing betraying his arousal being the pauses in thought that came with uneven breath. "That is true if you're an animal. It is our most primitive sense- the only one our logical mind cannot override."

"True," Will said- not to contribute to the conversation, but to see if Hannibal reacted to the sound.

Indeed, the cannibal's hands gripped the sheets as his hips thrust into the air. Will's voice, contained in the vibrating hollow of his throat, could bring the cannibal's body to the point of crazed, uncontrolled need; Will devoured the joy it gave him with an insatiable hunger. He

wanted to hear more of Hannibal's cries, see more of his tensing muscle, and feel more of his deep, quickening breaths until they came forward no more.

Will thought this to be an extension of his empathy; he saw in Hannibal what the cannibal saw in his own pleasure. He wanted to take Hannibal to the edge of humanity just as he himself had traveled, falling over that very edge, tumbling into the waters at its bottom, and witnessing his embrace of the deadly sea.

Hannibal, however expressive in his pleasure, rooted his hips back to the bed, determined to keep their conversation on a clear path.

"While we can very efficiently pull memories back to the surface, we can also trigger unpleasant- and even dangerous- behaviors through smell. "

Will, curious to know what danger Hannibal sensed in the sweet air around them, pressed for answers. "You have a superior sense of smell; what can you smell that I can't?"

"I can smell your shampoo. Your blood, your psychological excitement-" Hannibal exhaled, then threw his head back with a gasp as Will hummed in confirmation. His brows furrowed with need, and his chest filled with wind as he struggled to finish his sentence, "-your physiological arousal."

"Don't need your special nose to smell that," Will laughed, wrapping his lips around the base of Hannibal's cock. He let the pulse of blood beat in his mouth, so powerful it could flow down his throat, before dragging his tongue over its full length.

Hannibal's neck went limp, head lolling to the side as he let out a deep groan of pleasure. Encouraged by the sound, Will passed his tongue over Hannibal's cock again, drawing out another long moan from the man. When he reached its head, he took it onto his tongue and gave a gentle suck.

The cannibal's hips shot upwards without warning. His cock hit the roof of Will's mouth, slipping past the closed cavern and just into his windpipe; Will's throat constricted, tears brimming in the corners of his eyes as he forced unfamiliarity out with a cough.

Will let his body regain its balance. He choked out little gasps and pulled his tears back into himself, raising his eyes to brace against Hannibal's disapproving gaze. Instead of this, he was met with the same patient command- the one he'd ignored for the fleeting nature of suppressing physical hunger.

"Come here, Will. *Up*."

Each utterance of his name brought his eyes directly to Hannibal's hands. He shook his head and backed away, demanding an explanation, "Why?"

"I want to pleasure you orally. I am asking you to move up until your buttocks is aligned with my mouth."

Those words, almost cold in their connotation, made Will's face flush with warmth at their delivery. Hannibal, a man so well-versed in metaphor and linguistic veils, spun his most moving verses with crude, albeit graceful, anatomical terminology. Will considered that he'd never heard how Hannibal conversed with his lovers- nor did he want to- but presumed a layer of dishonesty had been stripped away when it came to himself. If clear directions were necessary, Hannibal Lecter would deliver them warmly, with elegance, and without fail.

"I just got started doing that to you. Don't you-" Will coughed, "Don't you want to 'watch me howl'?"

"You will be easily overwhelmed. Do you not remember how quickly you fell into extreme vulnerability just from the intrusion of my finger?"

"Don't you want me to be so vulnerable I can't even comprehend what you're saying?" Will retorted with a hint of mockery.

Hannibal shivered; those words were true, and he could not keep himself from confirming them. Still, Will could see how the beasts behind Hannibal's eyes wrestled with each other, for fear of frightening the mate they fought for. "I want you to experience it in a controlled environment after thorough discussion. Neither of us will benefit from this if you become overstimulated or distressed."

Although Will knew this- he knew it would happen, knew it had already happened- the coexisting darkness and delight of the unknown called. Will did not defy just for the sake of defiance, but to show Hannibal that he would exercise his power through his own hands. Determined, Will fought. "I want to fall. I'll fall into you, and you won't be able to hold me down with no hands and weak legs. I'll let it happen to me, and I'll pull myself right back."

"Will," Hannibal urged, tone gentling, "For your own safety, we should try another time. I will be by your side, not below or above you, and will let you feel as you wish."

He smirked at Hannibal's choice of words. "When has my safety ever been your priority?"

"If I am correct, the medical report from the night of your near-evisceration read, 'Hannibal Lecter cut Mr. Graham surgically, avoiding fatal damage to his vital organs.'"

Will did not say a word. He sat, motionless, and let Hannibal's words wash over him.

"I want to ensure you are safe, so we can discuss the extent of your submission without harming either party."

After a bout of knowing silence, Will spoke. "You're looking out for my physical safety, sure. But my mind- you want that all to yourself to mold." His voice quieted until he knew Hannibal would lean close to listen. Though not angrily, he forced out a plea; it floated with a heavy softness that preceded mighty thunderstorms, "And I'll let you; will you let me choose when, if I say I want you to break it here, now?"

Hannibal grew tense, sensing the storm that tumbled from Will's eyes. He spoke clearly, caution guiding every word, "Two sires, when overcome with instinct, will battle to the death

if given time and space. You, my dearest Will, are now being given the gift of my entire existence borne on the winds of time and space- I cannot control myself in your presence. What if my teeth sink too far, and you impale yourself on their edges?"

"We'll tear each other apart. But you're not afraid of that, are you?" Will snarled with a questioning twitch of his head. The harsh sound faded to a deep, vibrating growl. "No metaphors. Just say you want to fuck my brains out until I'm babbling nonsense and keel over from exhaustion," he spat, throat going dry. Will's head hung low; he tossed it left and right, letting the movement of imaginary figures in his mind's eye guide his words. His lips folded and parted slowly, imbuing each carefully enunciated syllable with shape and form, "Then you're gonna fuck my warm, soft, limp body for hours until you pass out right on top of me mid-thrust. All brutality. No mercy."

Will opened his eyes to Hannibal's own. They no longer had flecks of gold or brown but were pitch-black. The cannibal blinked, turning them impossibly darker upon opening them once more. He croaked out a weak, "No mercy at all," before swallowing, turning his voice clear- though still roughened with need, "You are a very visually creative creature, Will. I was right to use sign for commands."

Will took in Hannibal's utter dishevelment. He didn't need his body, mouth, or hands to bring Hannibal to the point of ferality; he needed only to speak his mind.

He watched the man squirm for a second more, then returned his voice to its normal timbre. "If I fall apart, I need to know you'll go with me. Neither of us can guarantee that I won't slip, but you can make sure we both do until we figure it all out. I'll go 'up' only if I know you'll suffocate without my skin blocking your airways."

Breathless, Hannibal whispered on the tail of a whimper, "I will let you tear my face in two if only to feast on the honey that bursts from within."

The ticking of the clock, now in a room far from them, still rang in Will's ears; it had faded into a drone all through their conversation, returning now in full force as it marked the hour. One strike after another, the pendulum swung, pressing the weight of time into Will's bones. Night settled into his skin with each ringing hour, making itself known in the drooping of his eyelids and the heaviness of his limbs. The lamp above them, once illuminating, now burned too bright for him to see anything but the penumbra of Hannibal's divine light.

The exhaustion from the ordeal, both mental and physical, had finally reached Will. He no longer wished to feast on Hannibal's flesh; that would require the muscles of his jaw to move. He would willingly offer himself to the cannibal, all fight and fire, if he would only have the chance to rest before he met his inescapable fate.

Still, his tongue worked ever-lively, a proper partner in dance for Hannibal. "That honey already burst forth in a great spout of sweetness and blood. Now we just have to harvest and let it sit. Give it time."

"*Up, Will,*" Hannibal signed, and opened his palm to take Will's hand.

He acquiesced.

Steadily, Will crawled back up the path of Hannibal's body. He paused at the man's neck and gazed at the pleased face below him.

"Up," Hannibal mouthed again, encouraging Will to move further. Will obeyed; he shuffled forward until his forehead met the wall and his chest pressed against the headboard. His thighs remained tense, his posture stiff, holding him upright to keep from smothering the living, breathing beauty below them.

Hannibal's hands flew to the meat where thigh met buttocks, gripping them tight. While firm, Hannibal's grip was not forceful; he only pushed Will gently, a few centimetres up, down, until hot breath nestled into the space where one man ended, and another began. The cannibal nosed at the wetness between Will's legs, inhaled, and let out a deep, well-held breath.

Will jerked and let out a startled yelp; the heat of Hannibal's mouth traveled straight to his core. His breath, no longer a single, solid entity, surrounded his cock and the folds around it in pleasant warmth; the initial contact had been startling, but Will relaxed into the sensation with ease. He felt Hannibal's breath bloom around him and when he moved to chase it, found the combined wetness of his own slick and the other man's sweat. It grew cold when he lifted himself, and turned warm once again when he fell back against Hannibal's lips.

He continued this pattern- cold, warm, cold, warm- until Hannibal started speaking from beneath him.

"Honey never expires; all it needs is time and patience to gain wisdom. It does not gain sweetness nor flavor with age, unlike wine."

Will paused. Hannibal's lips fluttered against his cock as he spoke, muffled slightly by the obstruction; Hannibal must have felt the same when Will hummed against his own skin. The touch, feather-light, beckoned Will towards more; he pressed himself against Hannibal's nose with a quiet moan, flirting with the sensation, before pushing his hips down and catching the man's tongue.

His voice warbled with restrained vibrato as he found a steady pace against the muscle, "It's reliable. It'll wait until we're ready, and will still be just as sweet..." Will concluded the sentence in silence as Hannibal placed a kiss to the swollen tip of his cock, which quickly turned to a long, worshipping flick of the tongue as Will forced himself into Hannibal's mouth. Beneath him, Will heard a whimper of joy brought on by hungry gulps of air. He lowered his head to observe just how Hannibal was making such small sounds, slowing his rocking hips for a clearer view.

Hannibal was not only lapping up Will's pleasure like an animal deprived of water, but smiling at the very privilege to do so. Will watched in awe, taking in the rare furrow of Hannibal's brows, the subtle sheen of slick around his lips, and the force of his breath that pushed curls of thick pubic hair aside. Hannibal was beautiful like this, so eager to give Will all he asked for, and taking as much euphoria as he gave.

Fueled by fascination, the gap in Will's incessant movements grew so large that it gave Hannibal time to muse, "You chase my touch like a dam in heat."

"Maybe that's all I am," Will laughed, though his expression quickly fell to one of slow, open-mouthed pleasure as Hannibal's lips moved against him.

"If that is all you are, then I am the lowly omega, exposing my belly at the breeding dam's feet."

Hannibal's subsequent attempts to continue speaking were quickly extinguished by the sudden snap of Will's hips, birthed by his own vibrating vocal cords and dancing lips. Will caught only snippets of speech from the blur of sex and sound. "Tonight, we know we may experience our pleasure with no rush and no worry. The next day will be the same," Hannibal dragged his tongue from Will's cock down to his hole, "and the next," dragged it back, "and forever forward," and back once more.

Through a path long and winding, Hannibal had understood Will's sentiment, bringing with it the opportunity of bark and bite to come. Will parted his lips to communicate his appreciation, but the sound morphed into a formless moan as Hannibal took his tongue to the rim of Will's spit-slick hole. He did not prod; Hannibal only brushed over it, pressing with soft, unfocused force.

Will's hands gripped the headboard at the prospect of intrusion. The touch, ever-so-gentle, threatened to impale him on its edge; he hungered for it to be threaded through the entirety of his body like a spit over a raging fire. All his muscles clenched with anticipation, pushing him down and inadvertently keeping Hannibal out as Will beckoned him in.

"Please," Will begged, "just eat me alive already. You've made me wait long enough."

Hannibal turned his face to the side, planting a suck-bruise on the white of Will's thigh. "I first have to savor your taste before swallowing you whole."

Between tiny, fruitless circles of his hips, Will pleaded, words so frail they bordered on tears, "I'll die if you stop."

"Meat is most flavorful when the animal is satisfied and relaxed in death."

"Then satisfy me before I die," he croaked, voice breaking with a whimper.

Will's cries grew more desperate as Hannibal's arm snaked free from under him. The loss was devastating; he would have wailed had he still held the resolve. Luckily, Will's prayers did not go unheard; Hannibal only stretched to turn off the light. Will tracked the taut rippling of his muscles as the man's finger flicked the switch; he did not have enough light to watch them snap back into place as the room turned black.

"Rest first, Will. It is night."

Hannibal roamed the curved, plentiful plains of Will's body with his hands. Blind, Will felt a tender squeeze atop both his legs- a second of mercy- before they were forced open.

He fell through empty air, slipping lower until his thighs met the protruding edges of Hannibal's cheeks. Hannibal's bones moved against his skin as he continued to give slow,

soft-voiced instructions in the dark. "Let your weight settle atop the headboard. Allow your neck to droop and your abdomen to relax with my touch."

As Hannibal spoke, the rumble of his voice passed through Will's skin with the ease of water. Just as Hannibal's breath had set his skin aflame, his voice calmed the heat with its even tone; when Hannibal's words flowed cool and crisp through his veins, following them was not a taxing prospect. Will let his head fall against the solid wall before him, the friction of curls holding him against the surface. With this release, the rest of his body followed suit, dropping onto the skin and sheets below him. The tension of passion remained in Will's spine, but the hand stroking his back, up and down, drew it from his bones and tossed it away into the dark; it faded in white-hot flashes, a shooting star across the night sky.

"Very good. Take your time, and I will take mine; we both have promised."

Will nodded, head heavy; he then exhaled, letting it slide down the wall. This pulled his body lower, dividing his full weight between the headboard and Hannibal's skull to feel the tease of tongue once more; the cannibal had no choice but to bite. Teeth grazed his thighs where their tendons tightened, easing a whimper from Will's throat.

"Breathe, and do not cry," Hannibal soothed, bringing a hand to Will's lips, pleading sounds still dancing on their blood-flushed swell. As Hannibal covered his mouth, he felt the air that rushed from his nose grow less wind-blown and more akin to a gentle breeze; his chest no longer rose and fell with force. The pressure of Hannibal's hand against his teeth, the steady caresses against his back, and the simple assurances that left Hannibal's throat were all pleasant.

Everything was pleasant in the dark. Even if eager claws drew blood in their embrace, gentle hands and kind words would tend to their wounds.

"Good boy," Hannibal praised, clarity of voice compromised by the spread of Will's skin; the vibration did not fade into the air, but sank into Will's bones, ringing like church bells.

This last cogent thought under the cannibal's touch faded away as Hannibal began to suck. Already, Will barely writhed; he only let his mouth fall open to release slow puffs of air in time with the pace. Even when Hannibal alternated between slow, reverent circles and hungry suction into his throat, the consistent, steady timing of each movement pulled Will into the promised land of tolling bells and bloody honey.

Will felt the weight of night against his eyes and simple, nice touches fall over his body—again, he quietly noted this encroaching vulnerability. He could not fight it as he sank lower, lower, until the cannibal fought for air below him just as fiercely; Will barely registered the quiet gasps as he moved his hips against the man, mind only knowing the breath beneath him bore rhythm.

Will fell further. He dropped from the headboard onto the bed, hair meeting the pillow with a soft thud. He made no effort to hold himself up, arms shaking, instead letting the falling slope of Hannibal's head hold the arch of his back. He felt his own breath against his abdomen; if he would turn on the lights, he would see Hannibal's lips taking his cock with a hunger known only to those who have starved for lifetimes. Will couldn't see it, no, but he felt the

waves of deep, hot pleasure that pooled between his legs, dripping from inside him and into the cannibal's mouth as a rich reward.

As Will relaxed into him, Hannibal could no longer restrict himself to slow, luxuriating mouthfuls; he moved forward with a delirious need for consumption. With each new swipe of tongue, Will writhed, helpless as his cock moved deeper into the cannibal's mouth, sucked, pressed, loved until his pelvis rolled and he felt skin against the crest of his hips; any harder, any deeper, and their bones would shatter into each other.

Neither man feared the bone-breaking, earth-turning force that ran between them. Will, muscles impossibly limp and pleasure impossibly growing, could only fuck himself into a frenzy against the man whose throat was constricted between Will's heat. His breaths rose in volume with his pleasure, coming out in quick, high-pitched whines with each thrust into Hannibal. Will pressed his mouth into the pillow to muffle them, as Hannibal had commanded, but only transferred them to the bedsprings that vibrated with each precious sound.

Hannibal gripped Will's legs to hold him still, keeping himself from suffocating as he gasped, "Speak."

Will groaned, edges of an argument forming on his tongue; the cannibal stopped the feeble protest with a nip to his thigh. "Do not cry out in pain, but in joy. Let me hear you," Hannibal coaxed, finishing the sentence with his hands holding Will's trembling hips in mid-air.

Immediately, Will tried to touch Hannibal's lips. He fought against the hands that held him up, pleading with little whimpers that needed no words to fulfill Hannibal's request; the man released him.

Will could not, nor would he keep his throat from speaking and Hannibal's lips from moving. He filled the air with his joy, singing until nothing but ghostly echoes left his mouth; Hannibal drew wisps of sound from him- hollow, empty croaks that held the overflow of pleasure. Hannibal moaned - a cry of warning. Will held his string of sound; he acknowledged Hannibal's fear with a sure, firm press of his pelvis into wet warmth.

All that remained was sound, sweat and the sweet scent of death that rose from Hannibal's throat.

Will collapsed.

As he lay motionless, the heat coiling in his stomach burst free, wringing one final groan from his throat. He felt his muscles tense and jerk once, twice, but knew they had only twitched; all Will could do was watch as he filled with soft, full-body surges of pleasure that overtook all the violence of orgasm.

The moment passed as quickly as it came. Hannibal still floated below him, casting his mouth over Will's still-pulsing, sensitive cock. Hannibal's skin was slick with Will's release, each slide of his tongue over Will's sex starting soft and ending sharp. The cannibal continued as if Will had not spilled onto him, fast and hungry and with all that made him a man-eater; Will could not cry out, for he could barely breathe.

He jerked left and right, snapping his hips away from the blade-edge muscle that tortured him. Hannibal was caught up in his pleasure, in the pattern and precision that had brought Will to his climax. He furiously thrust his hips into the air above him, rutting against nothing as his mouth twisted Will into pleading, thrashing arches. Will could not take it; he took a fistful of Hannibal's hair, pulling the man away as they sang songs of "no" and "please." Hannibal gasped at the expression of force, breath catching in his throat for one heart-stopping moment before he tensed all over, then stilled completely.

When Will let the man's hair go, Hannibal was quiet; everything around them was quiet, except for their heavy panting. Will's legs surrendered Hannibal's head, allowing him to feel Hannibal's breath against his stomach as they breathed in unison. He listened as their lungs calmed and their hearts quieted, the weight of night settling upon them after fire had burned through their chests.

Slowly, sleepily, Hannibal draped his arm over Will's back and rolled him onto his side. He drew the bedsheets over Will's blood-pumping body, the fabric trembling with the aftershocks of orgasm that passed through their spines.

Still panting, Hannibal cooed, "Sleep, dear Will. I will return soon."

Will didn't worry himself with Hannibal's return; his limbs were too heavy, his skin too warm, and his heart too content to care. He knew Hannibal would return, and if he left for long, would come back; this was the way of the world, constant as gravity and inevitable as death.

Inevitability made itself known in the dip of the bed as Hannibal settled beside him. Will fell into the curve, earning the weight of Hannibal's arm over his waist as he released a final, conscious sigh of acknowledgment. While he did not remember the sleep-slow wanderings of Hannibal's touch through the night, Will knew the warmth by his side welcomed him in all forms- man or beast.

Chapter End Notes

listen i was scrambling to find a place for a chapter break, i PROMISE, but could not find a natural lull. these boys just talk and talk and talk...
the fun and games are incoming. here is the MEAT (literally? figuratively? who knows... how many words can you even use to describe what licking feels like? a lot, according to yours truly.)
this one was pretty big, but *slaps roof of fic-shaped car* this bad boy can fit so much conflict resolution and tension in it.

also- I will be making changes to grammar and words throughout the fic; it's been over 6 months and some things could be executed much better, looking back on it! No big added interactions or plot changes- mostly grammar and language (change it's to its,

commas, "attempting" instead of "in an attempt to"... stuff like that). Much love to the wonderful person @avidreadr2 who helped beta a few chapters <3

Pasithea

Chapter Summary

Hannibal, eager to continue, brought his nose to Will's stomach before freezing. What before had only been the scent of awareness quickly became a concentrated panic, springing from Will's skin with dangerous speed. He did not need to raise his head to feel the tremble of Will's thighs.

"Is this-" Will swallowed, taking a deep breath, "this isn't a controlled environment."

Chapter Notes

quick **warning**: this chapter contains non-consensual somnophilia. putting this here in case anybody missed it in the tags!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The night sky, dotted with stars, cradled her millions of fiery children in arms of cool black. So did Hannibal; in the dead of night, his arms sent burning impulses through Will's skin, each message dying on the way to his lover's sleep-numbed brain. Even with this barrier, a few chosen impulses shot up Will's spine. Hannibal marveled as they wrote themselves into his lover's quickening breaths, flushed cheeks and frail sleep-sounds, making their marks with gentle etchings that barely registered in the man's quieted mind.

The fragility of the state just between wake and sleep had always fascinated Hannibal. He'd frequented it often as a child to stay alert in case of danger, though the need for such awareness had passed long ago. His adulthood only required the ability to feign sleep in company, or to indulge in the benefits of good rest when alone. With Will, though, he found himself returning to the twilight zone of muffled consciousness more often than expected. Its unpredictability fell away once his injuries faded in severity, but the occasional bout of drifting thoughts was not an unfamiliar- nor unwelcome- guest.

His nights were no longer accompanied by rocking boats and restless waves, but Hannibal could not always predict his unconscious mind; it seemed an entity unto itself, at times, merged with another in a seamless union. This union had awoken Hannibal; distant echoes of rhythm, of bodies dancing and boats rocking, brought him to wakefulness. Will's warmth was the first sensation he noticed as his consciousness came to focus- human, fluffed with hair and sending gentle, windchill breaths across his skin. Will's arms were tight around his waist, though not from tense muscles; his limbs were dead weight, heavy enough to keep Hannibal

pinned against the bed. The scratch of beard against chest hair tugged Hannibal's fluttering eyes open.

He couldn't make out Will flush against him as his eyes began adjusting to the limited moonlight. Mourning this lack of vision, he gave the man an appreciative stroke over his back; Will did not stir. His head only lay still in the valley of Hannibal's chest.

He was perfectly, completely vulnerable.

Hannibal couldn't rid his mind of the thought as he listened to the man's breath, slow and even, completely entrusting its flow into his care. He must have been like this himself, to Will, injured and reliant on his presence. He knew Will enjoyed taking care of him; this much was evident in his insistence on Hannibal's enjoyment. He'd felt a streak of sorrow the day before as Will climbed atop him, knowing the man would buckle even beneath gentle pressure. He'd been able to hold Will up then as the man let go; he wouldn't be able to do so, come his own unraveling.

Undeniably, there was greed to his craving of Will's pleasure. They both wanted to consume each other, mind and body, and had only now agreed to do so with full awareness and discussion. After seasons of fasting, years of giving and taking, Hannibal had Will's approval to have and to hold; tonight, in the dark, was no exception.

Hannibal pried Will from his chest to roll the man onto his back. Will's arms slipped from their loose knot on Hannibal's waist, falling to the mattress and his abdomen, respectively. Will's palm landed on his stomach with a hollow slap, reverberating over stretched skin and the mucosa-lined space beneath it. Hannibal lifted and dropped the hand, testing Will's awareness; not even his pupils broke from their paralysis behind his eyelids.

Satisfied, Hannibal lifted the sheets and pulled them over his head, hiding beneath them as they fell on a gust of failing wind. The bed could accommodate nearly twice the length of one man, leaving only Hannibal's toes sticking out from under the covers as he ventured lower; this left a small gap in the bubble of warmth they'd created as two bodies. He tucked his legs in, wincing; his body was not yet reaccustomed to such flexibility. The sheets tented over his back, the subtle scent of Will's sleep-sweat wafting towards his face and dulling any pain in his limbs.

This was not the bitter, fear-heavy residue that clung to Will after sleepless nights; the distress calls of a mind on fire, while electrifying in their potency, ultimately served as a cry for help. No- what poured from Will's skin was a pure aphrodisiac in comparison. As he settled into place by the man's crotch, Hannibal inhaled sharply, relishing Will's scent.

He couldn't locate its point of origin; its genesis was Will's very essence, coming from every pore of his body and crack of his psyche. Its headiness came to a peak in the damp of his groin, where smooth, sticky remnants of the evening's pleasures still clung to his thighs. Will's release had only begun to grow tacky from exposure. Hannibal dragged his nose across the white of Will's thighs, moving towards his sex- the source of his ecstasy- like a devoted hunting hound. He pressed his nose into its folds, enjoying the concentration of scent before him.

Will's stomach rose and fell with breath and his vessels filled with blood. All else was still; Will did not tremble with pleasure or rock his hips. While this was a loss, Hannibal took it as an opportunity to appreciate Will in a state of pure, untouched oblivion. He would wake in an hour, at least; his breaths were calm and his pulse slow.

Hannibal placed his lips atop Will's cock, not yet letting it penetrate. It was still red at the tip from hours-old overstimulation, though limp; it slid into Hannibal's mouth with ease. He pulled it up with a firm suck and began flicking his tongue; while Will did not pull away, the heat in Hannibal's mouth pulsed in response, hot and throbbing. Hannibal closed his eyes in bone-deep satisfaction.

Thoroughly warmed, Hannibal moved to the petal-soft flesh beneath Will's cock. He pushed away the hair that clung to its sides and slipped it between his teeth. Gently, Hannibal pulled at the skin, appreciating its elasticity. As he brought it further away from Will's body, it cooled, gradually taking on an eggplant-dark hue. The change in color amused Hannibal; the labia would've held testes had Will been born male, and such fondling would have been painful. He was grateful to hold the origin of man in his mouth. Hannibal had received the privilege of full exposure; he could dissect all that was and what could have been, free to handle all of Will- inside and out.

Hannibal took care not to leave visible marks. He was eager to lavish his boy in attention until his pink skin purpled, but could not bear to see him wake from pain. He pulled only until the skin stretched no more; he let it go and watched it settle, laying slightly enlarged. Hannibal watched in awe as Will's sex returned to a flushed pink before taking his tongue to Will's entrance. He made to wet the area but found it already lubricated; Hannibal preened himself at the fact. Even when asleep, Will's body could not help but react to his touch.

Hannibal allowed Will's slick to fall onto his tongue. He lifted it to the roof of his mouth and back, enhancing the musky, slightly-sour flavor. It brought to mind ambergris- pulled from the whale's stomach and prized for its scent. If Hannibal had the means to preserve Will's flavor, he would carve it from the womb and bask in its glory daily.

Repeatedly, as if starved of it, he devoured what spilled from Will's sex. He didn't force it with penetration, but allowed Will's body to respond naturally. This process took time; minutes turned to hours of silently appreciating Will just for the sheer pleasure of it- not to arouse himself, not to arouse Will, but to absorb the experience into every cell of his being.

As Will rose from a deeper stage of sleep, his pupils began to dance beneath his eyelids. Hannibal felt the thrum of Will's pulse quicken. It thrummed against his cheek from the squeeze of Will's thigh and beat against his tongue from the spasm of Will's hole. All this was not due to excitement; Hannibal knew Will would not move. His muscles, temporarily paralyzed by dreams, would not respond even in reflex.

Still, consciousness was returning at this point. Emotional and physical arousal were inevitable; although dulled by sleep, Hannibal's actions would reach Will's mind. He wanted to know as to what capacity Will felt and reacted when unhindered by thought.

Hannibal wanted to know.

Deciding to test the limits of Will's responsiveness, Hannibal lifted himself from the man's groin. He shuffled up Will's body, pulling his weight forward until his legs straddled Will's hips. He placed his hands around Will's throat for only a moment before running them across his body. In smooth, consistent motions, Hannibal's hands covered the planes of Will's chest, ribs, and stomach, then twisted down to hold his hips. Hannibal ran them up Will's sides, holding the full width of the man's rib cage in his hands; Hannibal squeezed.

Will responded in kind, shifting with a gentle inhale and exhaling as his limbs rearranged themselves on the mattress. Hannibal felt the breaths in his hands as Will's ribs expanded and relaxed. The man's consciousness was rapidly surfacing; he reacted to touch. Satisfied with Will's responsiveness, Hannibal hurried back to mouth at Will's now-twitching cock. He worked slowly, only suckling where before he would bite. Hannibal would call it greedy, even- lazy, indulgent, borne of an abundance of time.

The glimmer of awareness that Will had showed quickly dulled. The man's facial features smoothed out as he relaxed back into the mattress. Will sighed, a deep satiety falling over him. He reminded Hannibal of the Barberini faun- limbs splayed out, face slack with dreams, his drunken weight resting atop a stone. The satyr could be mistaken for a human if one only glanced at him; his defined musculature and genitals drew one's eye away from pointed ears and curved horns.

Hannibal fell into Will's easy pleasure. He closed his eyes to enhance his sense of taste, enjoying the experience of a calm Will allowing him to love. He would treasure this peace for an eternity, locking it away in his mind as a tapestry to hang on its walls. He almost did not notice the subtle, responsive jump of Will's cock, or the searching dance of lidded pupils for the source of their motion. Will's hole still bore the fruits of satisfied sweetness, masking the sharp scent of awareness that rose from his skin. Hannibal only ceased his self-serving gift as the slope of bone above Will's sex grew salty with new sweat; Will had stirred.

Hannibal stopped for a moment to take in the change before continuing, tongue ever-eager to see what Will would do.

"Hannibal..."

Will's voice was muffled by the covers over Hannibal's head, but pierced the feathered down with surprise. He pushed his tongue into Will for a final helping, anticipating the severance of his cord of pleasure; Will gasped in response. Clumsy hands traveled down the covers, prying them away from Hannibal's body. Cool air rushed past him as fingers fell to his scalp, grabbing his chin and pulling him up. Hannibal considered shaking them from his head, but as Will struggled to keep hold, Hannibal acquiesced to please him.

He met Will's eyes fluttering between wake and sleep. Will's lips, damp with drool, shone as he mumbled, "What're you doing?"

Hannibal wondered if Will would remember this moment. It was likely to be stored away in the vaults of his consciousness, unless this was a rare instance in which he was fully aware immediately after waking. Hannibal considered his next world carefully with this in mind, delivering them in a gentle, proud whisper, "Pleasing you."

Will blinked. Hannibal watched as his words registered in Will's mind, though the man's eyes seemed empty; he could not tell if Will was concealing his reaction, or was still under sleep's slow haze. He remained silent, staring ahead blindly; Hannibal's teeth grazed against Will's palm to encourage a response.

The man twitched, seemingly rousing from a trance. "I can't really feel you if I'm asleep," he slurred, relaxing infinitesimally into the bed. With this, Will loosened his grip on Hannibal's head, allowing him to return to Will's crotch. Releasing a breath of relief, Hannibal acknowledged the swell of the man's ribs with a soft kiss, further cocooning his skin in an adoring cloak of words, "The body processes what the mind cannot. You respond to sexual stimulation even in sleep."

Hannibal, eager to continue, brought his nose to Will's stomach before freezing. What before had only been the scent of awareness quickly became a concentrated panic springing from Will's skin with dangerous speed. He did not need to raise his head to feel the tremble of Will's thighs.

"Is this-" Will swallowed, taking a deep breath, "this isn't a controlled environment."

Will had recognized his own vulnerability and Hannibal's craving of it; he could not hide from Will's perception. Hannibal closed his eyes. "No. I am the perfect representation of greed- a deadly sin." He opened them to find Will's own staring back, stabbing with their intensity. His head was straining to keep from falling back to the soft pillow below, eyes shifting between boring holes into Hannibal's face and rapidly darting around inside their sockets.

"Is that sin above instinct?"

The question was almost rhetorical; a response would prove Hannibal guilty. The knowledge that he'd been violated in sleep, against prior agreement, had already proved to be damaging; a twinge of regret formed in Hannibal's stomach at the idea of Will in distress after so long a period of sweet silence. Still, Hannibal admitted to his thoughts without hesitation. His head, still hovering over Will's stomach, lowered to the skin in apology as he confessed, "Only slightly. I am awake and aware- and now, so are you."

"Can't resist it?" Will laughed soullessly as he tilted his head. The sound was empty- bitter even when touched by the sweetness of Hannibal's tongue. He adored it when Will presented such a punishment to others, but those hollow words carved all the muscle from his heart.

Even with this coldness, Hannibal noticed Will's eyes following the tease of his lips on exposed flesh. He continued to speak his mind aloud; truth, though separating his mouth from its nourishment, held more power than sins of omission. "Your oblivion, fueled by sleep, is beautiful."

Will's head fell to the pillow, no longer straining as he spoke to the ceiling, "I don't even have to try to please you."

"You please me when your skin grows hot and your muscles tense without your knowledge," Hannibal hummed as he kissed the cave of Will's navel. "You please me with your very

presence, Will. You bear no burden upon your back.”

“I might as well be dead. Same motionless body.” Will stayed still as his words formed in the air above him. He did not allow himself to be read, eyes distant and steady.

A fear-tipped arrow pierced Hannibal’s chest. Will, fully aware, was pulling away from his warmth; he did not appreciate Hannibal’s advances.

Knowing touch and tongue could not mend the wound, Hannibal sat up. He placed his hand on Will’s abdomen and moved it across the flat surface in a comforting gesture- moreso to quell his own unease rather than Will’s. This was not simple fear; it danced and crackled like a regret-filled flame. He missed Will’s easy peace. He missed Will’s eagerness and cooperation. Most of all, he missed Will’s affection.

“If you were dead, dear Will, you would feel nothing at all. I find pleasure knowing your mind registers my touch.”

Will squeezed his eyelids shut; Hannibal saw the wrinkle of skin over his cheekbones from his place at the foot of the bed. “The epitome of that would be to fuck me to death; I register it until it turns my brain to nothing but ash.”

Hannibal’s flattened hand curled into a fist over the pulse in Will’s stomach. “That is a tragically elegant concept in metaphor, but I would be much happier to bring you to unconsciousness rather than death.”

“I don’t want that,” Will forced out, each word harsh and heavy on his tongue. Hannibal unwittingly flinched at the volume, though kept his fist firm on Will’s skin as the man delivered the next blow. “I told you- let me decide when I fall. Then you can do whatever you want. But first, I decide.”

Hannibal opened his mouth to point out Will’s greed, but was cut off by a hand over his fist. “We’re equally selfish. You’ll take what you want,” Will squeezed Hannibal’s hand, “but only when I know what I want to give.”

The man’s voice grew in strength as he continued, eyes shining from the faint moonlight that fell through the window. “You run only when we both know you will. I fall only when we both know I will-“ he paused, urging Hannibal’s tense fingers away from the palm to lace them between his own, “and ‘both’ includes me.”

Hannibal let their fingers weave into each other. Will’s resentment had risen with marvelous speed- a natural reaction to a violation of boundaries- but had fallen just as suddenly into simple frustration. Will did not want to argue; he only wanted Hannibal to see through blind passion.

He squeezed Will’s hand in understanding. "I will do what you want and ask nothing in return."

A spark of triumph coursed through Hannibal’s body at the furrow of Will’s brow. He’d pulled his words from the stormy seas of a night long passed; Will remembered. Those words

had dug their heels into Hannibal's mind, pushing him towards satisfying Will and appeasing his hunger under a veil of service. A push and pull as violent as the raging ocean- pulling away until Will pulled him forward, pushing until Will pulled back.

Will crashed against him head-on. "Do you think all I want is my own pleasure? That I don't want you to feel the same?"

"All my pleasure comes from yours," Hannibal said, lips barely parting with the familiar words. He knew this as well as he knew the patterns of the stars and cycle of the moon; his joy only existed from Will's. But beneath the rhythms of nature, some things could not be predicted; seasonal rains could be forecast, but no man could determine where each droplet would fall.

"If I'm happy, you're happy?" Will asked, voice rising and growing soft.

Hannibal nodded.

"Ask for nothing in return, then, but let me give it back to you." He locked eyes with Hannibal. "It's only fair."

Will's voice was sweet but his words sharp; Hannibal sensed fingers prodding at his vulnerable flesh, leaving loving caresses on the surface while preparing to tear it apart with their nails. Will's empathy extended so far, grew so vast that its trunk tapered off into countless branches. Like the antlers of an aged buck, its tips were carved to a point that could separate skin from muscles with surgical precision. Will had taken Hannibal's words, torn them at the fascia, and revealed his beating heart. He'd seen through the guise of generosity and pinned Hannibal's greed to the wall; now he would toy with it. Hannibal marveled at the beauty of the empathy-wrapped antlers that grew from Will's head; he was the sole witness to the bloody, glorious shedding of their velvet.

"Reciprocation is a hallmark of our relationship; it seems we cannot avoid it, even in physical intimacy," Hannibal responded as he shook himself free from Will's grip. He clasped his hands together and placed them in his lap, noting the organic gaps in their shell-shaped structure. "I cannot possibly fall asleep knowing you would take me in the night, if that is what you are suggesting."

"You won't be asleep."

A cold knot formed in Hannibal's chest at those words. Will was not just planning to toy with Hannibal's greed, but to turn it against him- full reciprocation. He would do unto Hannibal as Hannibal had done unto him.

He challenged Will's words by echoing them, "Is this a controlled environment, Will?"

The man shrugged. "It's your bed. We're naked. It's quiet. And I'm here."

Will's points fell over him with little emotion- smooth and steady; he responded in kind. "This is the best possible environment for me. It is tailored for my comfort."

Hannibal kept his eyes anchored to his hands. Something akin to fear threatened to wet his palms and flush his skin; he spoke to return reality to his stomach between breaths. "Being controlled was your shelter; now you fear it from anyone else but crave it for yourself. Losing control was a distant impossibility to me; now I both fear and long for it from you."

Will nodded thoughtfully, taking in Hannibal's observations, but pushed any proper synthesis aside to prod at his weakness. "If you want it so badly then why are you afraid?"

Hannibal lifted his head to catch Will's eyes with a knowing show of teeth. "I would answer if you were not so perfect an example of irony, dear Will. Why spend years running from what you desire most?"

Will didn't respond. He barely even twitched; Hannibal's attempts at pushing back were brought to a halt by Will's blunt truth. "But you are afraid."

"I would not call it fear, but apprehension," Hannibal corrected and wet his lips. "I am human; I dislike the unknown as a result of my inexperience."

"Are you really?"

Hannibal did not want to be questioned. While he was not losing his patience, his unease grew ever-heavy at the discussion of fear- not Will's fear, not the world's fear- but his own. Hannibal's voice lowered with frustration. "I believe we had this conversation last night. We are creatures of instinct, but of reason first and foremost."

"I don't think you crawling between my legs while I'm passed out is an act of reason," Will smirked with raised brows. "Maybe all you run on is instinct."

This was a thought Hannibal knew how to tackle. He regained some confidence in this familiar territory of back-and-forth and 'maybe,' straightening his back with a spine-snaking crack. "Perhaps. But then would I not attempt to keep you from rousing if I acted only on instinct?"

Will's chin rose to take in Hannibal's shift in posture. "That's part of your instinct. It's different from others' - you're cautious. Unless," he paused with a grunt as he slipped a hand under his head, "Unless I grind your thoughts down to their core- eat, sleep, fight, fuck. Then you won't care if I wake up."

Hannibal shivered at the thought. He allowed his body to react to his mind's crazed impulses- allowed it the privilege to imagine a world in which his existence was degraded to nothing but that of an animal.

Will hummed with satisfaction at the reaction. The sound pulled another jolt of electricity from Hannibal's spine as he watched Will's lips join to hum, then part to speak. "That's also instinct on my part; if you get excited it means I'll get what I want."

"It is almost a conditioned response with evolutionary benefits- the moral obligation of reciprocation. We bring our mates meat from the hunt and are assured pleasure and offspring in return."

“I want you to feel what I feel. It’s greed, really; I’m just calling it reciprocation,” Will admitted as he turned his head to the side, closing his eyes. “I’m just as bad as you.”

“You, dear Will, readily give in to my demands. That overshadows your greed,” Hannibal comforted, touching his hand to Will’s face. “You are very good in my eyes.”

“The eyes of a cannibal,” Will scoffed, placing his palm over Hannibal’s. “And praise won’t get you out of this now; I’ve made up my mind.”

Hannibal gave a heavy sigh of exaggerated resignation to humor Will’s decisiveness; Will would drag Hannibal down with him. Before they fell, though, Hannibal made one last request. “If I cooperate, will you cooperate when I do the same to you?”

He leaned forward to catch whatever twitch of muscle betrayed Will’s thoughts, though was only gifted a sigh. Eyes still closed, Will whispered, “Yes.”

Hannibal fought not to let the sound of his words betray a smile as he praised, “Good boy.”

“Don’t try that on me.”

Will’s upper lip rose to reveal teeth; Hannibal could not discern a difference between the sharpness of his smile and the softness of his snarl. He ran his thumb over Will’s canine.

Even if Will refused to absorb his words, the line between play and predation was fine; he needed Will to confirm that moving across that line was expected of him. “I trust you will be cooperative at your most vulnerable. I cannot object to fair reciprocation, but you cannot as well.”

“Yeah, I’ll cooperate,” Will said, tone flat as he forced out Hannibal’s thumb with a stiffened tongue. He opened his eyes until they glowed like crescent moons in their sockets, waxing in preparation for their peak. He placed his hand on the pillow beside him, calling, “Come.”

Hannibal considered the context of the word in silence, frozen in thought until Will interrupted with calm, clarifying words.

“Next to me. Just lay down- you don’t have to do anything else.”

Hannibal let his body drop to the mattress with a unified thud. As his thighs relaxed and his spine uncurled, Hannibal sighed with relief; there was a simple joy in surrendering his weight to a structure strong enough to hold him.

As the immediate relief faded, Hannibal turned his head to meet Will’s moon-bright eyes. The man was staring at him, each blink blinding Hannibal with its reappearing light. Neither man moved. Hannibal filled the silence. “Am I not to hold you in my arms, or should I truly do nothing at all?”

“Nothing at all,” Will replied, stretching out the last word with a yawn. His arms stretched in tandem with his voice, hands spasming to grasp nothing but air. Upon their descent, one landed just behind Hannibal’s head, the other by his shoulder, both bearing a gentle press. “But move down a little.”

Hannibal obeyed. When he was so far down the covers cloaked all but his face, Will's arms encircled his ribs and pulled him close. He felt skin against his spine when he settled; Hannibal tilted his head to the side and caught Will's heartbeat.

It was not a pulse palpable only through touch; the sound echoed through the bones of Hannibal's skull. Each thrum of Will's heart held enough power to raise Hannibal's head from the chest it lay on.

Will inhaled. The room in front of Hannibal moved sideways with his eyes as Will's ribcage expanded and the heart he lay on slowed. The moment between breaths, however fragile, suspended Hannibal in time. It would all be gained and lost, over and over again, but Hannibal had it, now; he had it in his mind as tangibly as he had the inhale against his cheek.

Hannibal's eyes flew open as Will's hand landed atop his head, pulling him from his stillness. He managed to steady his breath and catch a gasp of surprise in his throat, but failed to conceal the single second of his muscles tensing.

He knew he could not avoid Will's perception; Hannibal almost expected the reassuring pressure of Will's hand as the man soothed, "S'okay. I'm just touching your hair."

Hannibal nodded in confirmation to stop Will's pitying words. It was not unpleasant, but the softness that slid from the man's throat was foreign to Hannibal's ears and familiar to Will's tongue. He'd never heard such pity and reassurance leave Will's mouth for any being other than an innocent victim or an animal. Hannibal bristled with distaste at the idea of being spoken to in such a condescending manner, but the surge of hostility quickly gave way to a storm of jealousy. Those words were meant for something small and scared; they foreshadowed an onslaught of care and compassion. The fact he'd never been spoken to with such unbridled attention burrowed beneath Hannibal's skin and multiplied in his bloodstream.

Wave after wave of thought collided in Hannibal's mind. He questioned the very nature of Will's empathy; had he only now understood the extent of Hannibal's frailty? Was he using Hannibal's desires against him? Why had others been deserving of Will's affection, and not he? Quiet resentment threatened to grow into a shout as Hannibal's muscles tensed slowly, steadily rising to a crescendo of sorrow.

All this fled from his body in one breath as he felt the sudden scratch of fingernails against his scalp. They moved two times in succession; the first brought Hannibal back into Will's arms, and the second reanimated his heart against Hannibal's ear. His worries, while still present in the back of his mind, faded into calm waters at the gentle touch.

"You okay?" A quiet question.

Hannibal swallowed. "Your voice is kind. You talk like this to your dogs."

"I don't have anyone else to be gentle with anymore," Will said. His voice, low with mourning, lightened slightly as he lowered his head in Hannibal's direction, "I think you need it more often than I give it to you."

It was not that Will had discovered Hannibal's frailty; he had only recognized the need for such a different form of affection. So often were their displays of passion intense, that peace seemed invasive. Hannibal opened a single door to his thoughts, letting one cold droplet trickle out, "Do you not think it's condescending?"

"Do you?"

Hannibal fell silent. His initial reaction had been to recoil with bite, but there was no need to do so physically; the effect of Will's words was undeniable. "It is calming."

"That's the point," Will chirped with satisfaction, putting his hand into motion.

The drag of Will's fingers through his hair, catching on the roots of graying strands, only proved to sink Hannibal's head lower onto Will's chest; the man's heartbeat grew loud and all-encompassing from this proximity.

Hannibal spoke as his lover embraced him, both of them close-eyed and at rest. "I was listening to your heart's steady beat. It is a marvelous machine, forever loyal to its one, single purpose; your touch was a sudden interruption to that loyalty."

"It won't ever stop beating, though. You can always come back." Speech reverberated in Will's chest; Hannibal heard the sound bouncing from the curve of every rib. It was then lost to the air around them, leaving nothing but the ever-present, ever-steady rhythm of Will's heart.

Hannibal let his neck relax onto the reliable surface beneath. His muscles forgot their prior startle; even his throat, always tense with volume, loosened into a whisper, "Until you die."

"Until I die," Will echoed back, hand still moving; life would not leave it yet. Will's fingers moved down his neck, pausing as he spread his palm over its nape. He then ran them over Hannibal's shoulder, around his ear and back to his hair. Hannibal could not help but lean into the touch; he tilted his head towards the hand that vanished as suddenly as it appeared, grunting to himself with frustration as it left.

Thankfully- hopefully from noticing Hannibal's dissatisfaction- Will returned his hand to his neck. He gave a gentle scratch before proceeding to wrap his fingers around Hannibal's throat. Will's fingers, although loosely coiled around Hannibal, rolled against his Adam's apple as he swallowed. Countless impatient questions hung from the roof of Hannibal's mouth; instead of breaking the silence, he waited for Will to reveal the gears of his mind turning.

"You like that?" Will asked, voice hushed and tentative.

"Mhm," Hannibal hummed, letting the pressure of Will's grip crawl down his spine. It was a test- a pulling of tendons and stretching of boundaries.

Will said nothing, only acknowledging Hannibal's pleasure as his fingers tightened along his throat. Hannibal noted how Will's hand shifted for a firmer grip; he was in a prime position to be choked. The realization dawned upon him with a speed trained by years of self-

preservation. Hannibal made to open his mouth and comment on the intensity of such an act, but failed to suppress the spasm of his throat as Will squeezed.

Almost immediately, awareness of his body moved to his limbs- how his extremities tingled with each barricaded breath. Hannibal could no longer hear Will's heart; the pounding of his own drowned it out. It pumped blood through his skin, rushing it to the surface until it bloomed into blotches of heat. His face warmed; he attempted to blink away the sweat that formed in the creases of his eyelids but only succeeded in making them flutter helplessly. The world grew incomprehensible against the flickering light of his blinking. The entirety of the universe resided in the heat of Hannibal's skin, in the thrumming of his heart in his ears- in the crying of his voice and the swelling of his cock. Hannibal let a wave of motion rip through his body; his head snapped to the side, his hips bucked into the air and his legs shook with need for sustenance.

Will only held his windpipe tighter as he writhed. "You're beautiful," he breathed, taking a free finger and placing it along the edge of Hannibal's lips as he admired the man. "Look at your mouth open and gasping for air. Look at your chest heaving, your fingers clenching, your eyes scrunching and fluttering. Look at what I can do to you," Will whispered in awe as if describing Hannibal to himself alone. Hannibal collected the shards of Will's descriptions and arranged them into a window illuminated by the burning sun of his mind. He traced the stained glass and saw only crudely rendered human flesh; he did not have the capacity to see through Will's eyes when his own vision was fading so rapidly.

"You look like an angel that fell to earth for lust; greed isn't your only deadly sin," Will said as he placed his lips to Hannibal's forehead, shining with sweat; Hannibal felt them curl into a smile. He thought to inform Will of the cursed children born between fallen angels and man- nephilim- though found he could no longer speak. The barrier, so often mental, had become physical; Will held Hannibal's voicebox tight in his hands.

He rolled his eyes up to look at Will but only caught the furrow of his own brow and the blur around the periphery of his awareness. The fleeting thought that a rolling of the eyes signified a fading consciousness passed through Hannibal's worries, but faded as he directed his attention to the sheet of black falling over his vision. He remembered how Will's face looked in moments of blissful unawareness- shining with sweat and with eyes blank as his mind. He was always peaceful after Hannibal soothed him. Before the moment of peace, though, there was always turmoil- a terrible shaking and suffering that always gave way to serenity.

Hannibal, fighting the hands of a lover against his throat, had been deprived of nourishment long enough. The pounding in his ears remained ever-present, but his chest only gave weak jumps as his wheezing turned quiet. Hannibal managed to vocalize the one thought that rang clear in his mind, letting out a single cry as relief settled into his lungs, "Will?"

Before he allowed himself to relax with defeat, a wave of air forced its way into Hannibal's windpipe. His lungs burned at the sudden intake of life; Hannibal coughed once, ragged, until both of Will's hands intertwined with his.

Will had set him free.

"I don't like hearing you choke."

Will's voice reached his ears in short bursts as blood rushed past his eardrums. He gave his beloved's hands a quick squeeze before whispering between gulps of air, "That may be evolutionary. A mother is compelled to tend to her crying child to stop the terrible noise; and so the human race lives on."

"I could cut the thread of fate at any moment."

"I do not enjoy the idea of being so close to death," Hannibal explained, swallowing. "Rather, I enjoy the body's reaction to asphyxiation- flushing skin, a racing heart, and frantic, simple thoughts. Its physiology is strikingly similar to that of orgasm." Physical arousal was merely a response to the increased bloodflow from fear; nevertheless, Hannibal felt it. He felt his cock twitch when deprived of air as strongly as he felt his throat constrict under Will's hand. He did not associate asphyxiation with sexual arousal, but the physiological similarities were undeniable; there was an inherent eroticism to the body's hunger for oxygen.

"I like watching you fight until you're on the brink of fading. And knowing you enjoy it-" Will paused, releasing Hannibal's hand to caress the side of his windpipe, still hot with returning blood. He stroked it with the back of his hand, keeping his fingers far from the fragile tissue. Hannibal noticed a slight jerk of Will's hips as the man sighed, voice quiet with thoughts of opportunity, "I want to do it again and again."

Hannibal loosened the muscles of his neck, allowing his head to loll and fall onto Will's arm. Before Will had choked him, he'd intended to let the man touch him like this- gently, not threatening violence. Still, his body's involuntary reaction seemed to bring Will as much arousal as it did himself. "You are as eager as I to take my pleasure."

"You're letting me, while I wasn't letting you. That's the difference; imagine if I woke up to you choking me," Will responded with a scratch to the unshaven stubble along Hannibal's jaw. Hannibal held an increased awareness of where Will's fingers were in space; he would protest if Will attempted to return them to his neck.

"I imagine you would not have appreciated it," Hannibal smiled. He held his breath as Will's finger slid over his throat one last time before returning to his hair. Hannibal let his breath leave him as the threat passed, "I certainly have my limits as well."

Will huffed with amusement. "Death?"

"Unconsciousness," he replied. "There is a finality to death that is reassuring. Unconsciousness makes one prone to losing time- something I actively avoid."

"If anything happens, I'll remember for you," Will assured him, digging his hands through Hannibal's hair until they stole heat from his scalp.

"If you are in a position to do so," Hannibal warned, only keeping his resolve for a moment before returning to his home over Will's heart. He let the beat steady his own as he attempted to visualize Will's course of action, "How do you plan to continue?"

"Just like this- with my hands."

Although Hannibal could not see Will's hands moving, he saw their phantom forms dancing over his skull- front to back, back to front. When they fell to his neck, Will pressed his thumb to the very base of Hannibal's skull; his head slipped forward from the push. He made to return it to the pillow of Will's chest, but was cut off by hot air over his exposed nape as Will planted a warm, open-mouthed kiss to the area. Hannibal closed his eyes as the heat spread throughout his back, traveling down his spine in a lazy, arousal-filled impulse. He would not have been surprised if his brainstem had been impacted by the warmth; his head drooped forward in reflex at the touch of Will's lips.

"There you go. It's easy, isn't it?" Will purred, stroking Hannibal's back as they both settled into the mattress. Hannibal nodded; the answer was obvious, even in the face of denial. As his head moved, Will wrapped his hand around Hannibal's neck- this time to keep it lowered. He squeezed the column of meat and muscle, letting it slide from his fingers until he was holding it pinched. Hannibal was reminded of kittens being held by the scruff of their necks; the pressure of the pinch rendered him immobile in Will's grasp.

As Will let go, Hannibal's body melted further into the vast expanse of skin below. As Will voiced his observations aloud, his voice resonated in Hannibal's throat; he felt no need to speak when Will's words filled his mouth instead. "Meat tastes best when it's relaxed. And it's night- makes this all the more easier for us both."

Hannibal laughed through his nose, a single gust of wind escaping before his breath returned to its easy, even pace. He'd used the same rhetoric on Will to calm him; though changed by Will's tongue, the words were nevertheless effective. Scraps of responses floated through Hannibal's mind, but all failed to combine into a coherent sentence. His breaths came slow and his movements slower. Though he preferred to deny the effects of biology on his mortal body, the instinctual fear of asphyxiation had taken its toll; Hannibal was exhausted.

"And I thought you said you wouldn't be able to fall asleep."

Hannibal opened his eyes. He hadn't been aware of them closing in the first place, but the wave of worry passed before it could even form as Will's hand moved up his head. It moved down, stayed for a second to love the vellus hairs at his neck's end, and moved up again.

Consciousness was a peculiar thing; one was not always aware when it left. Hannibal fully absorbed the pleasure Will's hand gave him with every stroke, taking in the speed and pressure of each, and yet his mind deemed the situation safe enough to surrender itself to- safe enough to ignore such detail.

"I was not yet asleep," Hannibal argued, holding back a yawn, "although it seems I may have overestimated my excitement."

Will dragged his nails over the delicate skin behind Hannibal's ear. "Don't talk or you'll get too excited. I'll talk for you."

Hannibal thought to ask what this meant, but kept his questions in the form of thought only; he let Will speak, latching onto his words and relishing how each one slipped off his tongue. At the very least, they would prove an entertaining subject to analyze.

“You’ll know your falling asleep when my words start losing meaning. You’ll still pick them up- you’ll think you’re listening, but they’re just blurring into one long string of sound.”

Will emphasized his last few words by stretching out the vowels; Hannibal almost did not notice the change in tense. His face twitched in an attempt to smile. Paired with the physical exhaustion, the suggestive language was an effective tool to keep him compliant; Hannibal would have complimented Will on his strategy, had he the will to move his lips.

“I know you’re still listening. Your short-term memory is here for just a bit longer; if I ask you to repeat what I’m saying, you’ll be able to say the last few words, but not summarize the concept. That’s why it’s important to just keep talking; your mind will gloss over what I’m saying, pick up all the important words that become heavy in your thoughts, and fall into oblivion.”

Will’s explanations, fueled by logic, moved through Hannibal’s mind without obstruction. The concepts were familiar to him; however foreign the feeling was, the process behind it was a natural occurrence- a known psychological principle. Knowing this, Hannibal buried his face into the hair dusting Will’s chest; the friction moved his awareness from his mind into his body.

“You feel how the words rumble in my chest. It’s easier to focus on the feeling rather than the meaning. You hear my heartbeat, my voice, my breathing, my fingers all moving at the same time and at the same pace.”

This was true. Not only could he hear Will’s heart, he could feel it push his ribs upward with each beat. Will’s ribs were not the only part of his body that moved; his chest rose and fell with each breath. Hannibal noted the gentle incline of his neck as Will inhaled, the pressure of Will’s heart against his cheek second by second, the vibration of Will’s voice in his bones, the fluid, ceaseless motion of Will’s fingers in his hair- all of it was Will and Will alone.

“You try to keep track of each one- that’s how you are- but you can’t. Your attention is divided into so many pieces that it shatters into nothingness; I’m all you can feel.”

All that Will spoke, Hannibal felt. Every physical sensation stacked on top of the other until they all dissipated into nothing but constant pleasure, millions of waves forming the ocean’s roar. They did not crash and break like rough waters; a blanket of warmth flowed over Hannibal’s body with each pass of Will’s hand over his skull.

Hannibal did not have to do anything. He let the feeling wash over him as Will kept talking about nothing at all. His love’s words moved ever forward, all a blur of moving lips and gentle hands.

“You’re just the same as me. Nothing different about what makes you vulnerable; you just haven’t experienced enough of it.”

Will’s hands stopped.

His heart was still beating, his chest still moving, his voice still echoing, but his hands had stopped.

Hannibal saw his own arm moving in search of Will's, though found it only to exist in his mind's eye; he did not want to move. He did not want to worry. But without Will's touch, all that was promised to him had fallen from his hands, and Hannibal could do nothing about it.

His helplessness managed to squeeze his throat shut, wringing out a breathy puff of fear from his nose. Hannibal did not hear the sound come from his body; he felt it in his bones- the universal cry of a creature in need.

His first attempt at gaining relief went ignored. His second, fueled by abandonment, presented as a piercing whine.

"Oh-" Will gasped, sending wind flying past Hannibal's closed eyes as he wrapped his arms around him. "Hey, it's okay, you're okay..." Will shushed, voice wavering. Its gentle lilt, accompanied by the shake of hesitating hands, eased Hannibal's mind. Will's arms, however quivering, held him tight; they would not leave him now. Trusting they would keep him upright, Hannibal dropped all his weight the moment Will embraced him.

Will fell backwards from the impact. He immediately sprung back up, then slowly let Hannibal's weight pull him down. On the descent, he pushed up once more- the final move to settle them both into perpetual motion. Back and forth, up and down; Will was rocking Hannibal. So immediate was the relief of repetition that the water of Will's words returned at full force. Their message of comfort did not matter; all that mattered was that they were there.

"It'll be calm and easy. You won't have to be afraid of anything, you won't have to worry about anything- not even about pleasing me."

Hannibal vaguely registered the warmth of Will's chest being replaced by a cool pillow. Before he could cry out again, heat covered his mouth; Hannibal let it linger as he recognized Will's taste. He did not think to reciprocate; he thought only of Will's breath and the soft wetness that came with it against his tongue.

"You'll always feel my skin against yours no matter what. You'll feel what I feel; we're conjoined. And it feels wonderful."

Hannibal existed in the warmth that moved from his lips to his entire body. He existed in the distant pressure that enveloped his cock, and he existed in the twin heartbeats and eight chambers that pumped his blood- half slow, half fast.

"How do you feel?"

All Hannibal could do was agree as Will's question pried open his numbed lips.

"Wonderful."

last week the website i was using to write and plan and plot ALL of my work for this fic (and disorganized class notes... oops...) went down completely. domain expired. gone. poof. the owner likely went to jail (this is just a rumor for now but... there are theories and some compelling evidence that could just be a coincidence) and didn't pay to renew the domain, so it's not coming back anytime soon. I was very lucky to have all the chapters except this one backed up in a google doc for emergencies, but all the notes, outlines and references are... gone :(I am now using a different program and a spiral notebook to plan this thing out. had a fun (not fun) week of rewriting this entire chapter, outlines, notes, and the plot of this novel-sized fic, so... sorry about the delay on this one. our boys died and experienced yet another fire-fueled rebirth through the hands of their omniscient, omnipotent maker.

these chapters seem to be getting longer and longer?? but i DO have a plan. there is a purpose and it is all coming together (i hope). sadly they are also taking longer and longer to write; I will try my best not to take longer between updates but it may come to that. sadly this is the price I pay for posting as I write, but one day. one day this will be done. we are about 1.5/4 of the way through the plot i think.

Ganymede

Chapter Summary

Will turned his gaze seawards, inching forward to leave Hannibal admiring the ruffled curls at his neck. His voice, muffled by distance, still rang in Hannibal's ears ever-sweet as Will responded.

"We're different, then; I want you to let me drown. I'll bring myself up to the surface," he recoiled as a lone wave graced his leg, stepping back to face Hannibal, "and you'll be watching all of it."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal did not feel Will.

Floating, suspended in water, it did not worry him as it did before; he knew Will's touch was nearby to reassure him.

Still, any remnant of logic littering Hannibal's mind was quickly overpowered by the threat of his cooling skin- the threat of warmth lost to the sea. A small sound, breathy and desperate, left Hannibal's throat; it was only to see where Will was in space- a form of proprioception, of echolocation. Where vision was not reliable, call and response were his lifeline.

Will responded with a gentle hand in Hannibal's hair. He did not speak and for this Hannibal was grateful. Speech was a distant memory locked in the hallway of his mind; he and Will frequented a room all to themselves, without the burden of speech.

A body pressing against Hannibal's own followed the departure of Will's hand. He felt Will's curls against his lips, and the embossed ridges of his love's spine against his sternum. His muscles tensed to embrace the warmth before him, but the movement was silenced by gravity's forceful arms pinning him to the mattress.

Hannibal screwed his eyes shut in protest, ready to challenge gravity itself, but acquiesced to a soft brush of pressure against his groin. Gravity mattered no more; its force paled in comparison to the pleasure that enveloped his sex. Air entered his mouth as his lips parted with wonder; how could a feeling be so concentrated yet his mind so unraveled? He let the question's frayed edges tangle and fall away as hot pressure dispersed across his abdomen. It slunk over his thighs, pressed into his stomach and nestled into the gap between his neck and his clavicle. Everywhere- it was everywhere.

"Do you feel anything?" Will's voice broke into a whisper. Its wet heat poured from his lips and over Hannibal's skin, coaxing words from his mouth; Hannibal could only groan, deep and hitching against the ridges of his throat. Burying his nose in Will's hair, he breathed in, out; his beloved's arousal hung heavy in the air. Though as the scent passed through his nostrils, fresh and eager to be inhaled, it clung to the roof of his mouth; it did not flow past his tongue.

Hannibal swallowed, dividing a growl in two with the motion. The spasm forced Will down his throat, into his stomach, and into the nerves that controlled stuttering hips; he could not control them as the scent called them to motion, a rider encouraging its slowing horses with swift licks of the whip.

"Yeah. That's good," Will breathed, punctuating the phrase with a slow roll of his buttocks into the dip of Hannibal's pelvis. It cradled him like a pair of welcoming arms, perfectly concave and shaped for its other half. As Will's skin passed over his groin once more, unfocused in its pressure, Hannibal forced his hips into the warmth; his cock caught between Will's tensing thighs.

Will snapped them closed immediately. Hannibal shuddered with overwhelm at how the plush fat of Will's thighs enveloped his cock, leaving its head cold and exposed on the other side. The captor squeezed his legs against the new sensation, waiting, then proceeded to move, slow and even. The rhythm pushed his scent deeper down Hannibal's throat, pulled his cock farther into open air, and sent both their heads bobbing helplessly in repetition. Hannibal barely breathed in awe; he lay still, allowing all of Will's force to move him with its pure, untamed power. He was too weary to overpower Will, and the pleasure growing in his groin from Will's efforts alone was enough to satisfy him. Hannibal enjoyed the droplets of heat that bloomed from his breath, and all but fell limp against Will's writhing body. He savored how his forehead brushed against soft sheets, hair gaining electricity from the friction. He savored how the skin stretched over his hips stung with each of Will's thrusts. He savored how Will's body, pressing into his, crushed his lungs and made them sing with gasps and stutters.

Will paused, pulling ever-weakening slaps from the skin of his buttocks colliding with that of Hannibal's stomach. When the sound dissolved into silence, Hannibal whimpered in protest; silence meant stillness, and stillness meant no pleasure.

"I know," Will soothed, turning his head back to catch a glimpse of his beloved; Hannibal's mouth graced stubble-studded skin as Will turned. He flinched as the sharp hairs stabbed his sensitive lips, instead reclaiming his shelter in Will's ruffled hair. He felt Will's voice reverberate through him as he eased Hannibal's cries, "Don't worry, I know if you'd have the time to think, you'd tell me not to stop."

Hannibal grunted, nose wrinkling from the tickling vellus hairs at Will's nape. He slid his hand across Will's back, pressing the spine to inject life back into its notches. Will only curled into the touch, arching his back and moaning softly.

"You feel so good already; you're panting."

Hannibal took notice of his own chest's heavy falls. Will was observing, even clouded by arousal; what came from his mouth held more truth than any sacred text, any sermon, any prophecy- it was simple fact. The words slipped past Hannibal easily, and the thought that Will was speaking for him fell away with the next gust of breath.

Hannibal pressed again, this time catching a finger in a dimple of Venus. He circled the dip, savoring its shape, then pushed his hand forward. The force sent Will's hips into a mechanical, unavoidable bout of perpetual motion as he rocked forward with a yelp. Hannibal enjoyed the sensation for only a second before warmth disappeared from his cock altogether.

"Don't force me," Will reprimanded, steadying himself and parting his legs to reveal Hannibal's cock, lying limp on the flat of his thigh. Hannibal whimpered once more, though the sound was more akin to a croak as it escaped his throat; his desperation overpowered the stiffness of controlled speech.

"Just one thrust and I'll start again. Show me you can choose between paralysis and pleasure. Can you do that for me?"

Will's words echoed in Hannibal's mind as he weighed his options on great, cosmic scales. He could lay still in Will's arms in a haze of pleasant heat without any pleasure- a beautiful tragedy. He could set himself into motion and receive gifts of fire in return, be they verbal or physical. He did not have to worry when Will understood this tipping of scales. He did not have to worry at all; Will knew moving would feel better, and Will knew what would bring him the most pleasure, offering it first. Hannibal knew to follow.

A single jolt flew through Hannibal's spine. His hips snapped forward with a small, juddering thrust; Will's legs shut on his cock in response. The law of inertia, far greater than any logically-weighted conflict of free will, was the only thing acting on Hannibal's body. One thrust, one movement, one choice, and all others came after in a frenzy of feeling and absence of forethought- pure instinct, pure automaticity.

Pleasure- white-hot and instantaneous- ran through Hannibal's veins; his obedience brought with it the gift of instant gratification. The thick tar of indulgence fell away, replaced by swirls of gold, fiery motion; Hannibal could barely believe he'd been tempted by his lover towards the sin of sloth.

Still, the waves of pleasure coursing through him could not fully cloak Hannibal's awareness. Will had promised he would start moving in time with Hannibal; he grunted, softly, and punctuated the sound with a rough thrust that stung his skin as it struck Will's buttocks. Will jumped from the impact, giving Hannibal all he needed to regain a brutal rhythm.

"Be patient," Will hissed, though the responsive roll of his hips overcame any playful reprimand on his tongue. Instead of baring teeth, the words faded into heavy, open-mouthed breaths. Hannibal only responded with more force at the fact, relishing how Will's voice wavered in time with his knife-sharp thrusts as Will whined out, "I would never forget my promise. But you can't make me change my mind."

Hannibal wrapped his fingers around Will's hips, pulling the man close as he thrust forward. He caught Will's pulse just below the jut of his pelvis- a crazed thing, strong and firm in its beat. It almost jumped out at Hannibal with its ferocity; he only tightened his grip.

"That's right, fuck into my thighs," Will gasped, lips curling into a smile. "Maybe I shouldn't care if you're impatient."

The breathlessness of Will's voice- the frailty and jostle of it- tugged at the ribs surrounding Hannibal's heart. He preened at the praise, pausing to move his hand from Will's hips to his bare chest. The soft flesh melted into his palm, humming from the heart beneath. A single raised, jagged line ran beneath his fingers; he pressed into it, adoring its solidity before squeezing Will flush to him.

Not even gentle praise would keep Hannibal from chasing his sharpening orgasm out of Will's skin. His hand splayed across Will's chest, Hannibal held him close as he moved faster, thrust harder, buried his face deeper into his beloved's neck. The fat at his flanks threatened to separate from its anchoring muscles as he pounded into Will, all instinct and incessancy.

As breath after breath escaped the seal of his mouth against Will's neck, Hannibal took notice of a hand in his hair. It held to his scalp, tugging in time with his hips, its fingers trembling with each thrust. Hannibal allowed himself this moment of focus to adore Will's hand, but found it slowed his pace; he gave a weak thrust of warning before mercilessly reclaiming his speed.

"Can't even have my hole-" Will paused, stifling a yelp and readjusting to Hannibal's speed, "and you're already so needy." The sentence ended with a whine that yanked all of Hannibal's attention to the man before him.

What lay in front of him- what held his cock between its legs and his very heart in its hand- was a being with its own needs. Hannibal had been absorbed in his own pleasure, and not in the blooms of sensation that Will's mind was so adept at conjuring. Hannibal did not nurture the sting of guilt in his chest, but moved his hips faster and held his love closer. He wanted to see Will's pleasure intertwine with his own. Hannibal wanted Will to know just how strongly his words made him tremble when he drew cries of praise from Will's lips.

Letting out a huff, Hannibal spoke the entirety of his mind in a single, rumbling word, "More."

"Good. You can admit it now," Will praised. Hannibal felt the sound in his hand as it fled from Will's chest to the bones of his fingers; the breaths that accompanied it were not labored enough. Hannibal tightened his hold on Will's sloped pectoral until both lungs struggled to expand. Satisfied with the pressure, he took a deep breath, feeling Will's chest rise against his, and snapped his hips forward with an eagerness found only in the frantic tremors of divine madness. The head of his cock graced Will's sex; as he pulled away, the closed heat of Will's thighs grew coated with slick spilling from inside.

Will shuddered. "See? You need me," he whispered, pulling his chin to his neck as a stifled spasm ripped through him, "and I need you." He closed his eyes to give the order, brows

furrowing with a desperate plea, "Again. Just the tip again." Urgency saturated the command; consequence sat in its wake.

Hannibal, encouraged by the tease of delicate flesh, did as he was told. Again, again- he pushed the weight of his cock into the folds between Will's legs, coating it in warmth and wetness. The sensation, while only tactile against the head, traveled straight to the base of Hannibal's cock. He could not keep his fingers from curling into claws as the pleasure radiated through him, pulling groan after guttural groan from his chest.

Will writhed and hissed against the drag of Hannibal's clenched fingernails; Hannibal only released Will's burning skin from beneath his nail beds when the man cried out in pain-soaked pleasure. He brushed his fingertips against the reddening marks, admiring the art created from involuntary flexion of fingers. Will twitched against the soft caresses, whining; the flurry of little cries sat atop deep, rolling waves of sound that crashed past Hannibal's tongue. They came with each of Hannibal's thrusts, forced out of him by the rhythmic meeting of lungs and larynx. Will's throat soon surrendered its capacity for speech to little breaths; each gasp started with a moan, but came out strangled as a thirst for air overpowered the urge to cry out.

Will's hand tangled deeper into Hannibal's hair, fingers so tight in the silver strands that their tensed joints shook. They trembled with the fierceness of the waver in Will's voice as he encouraged Hannibal, "You don't have to be passive- I know you don't want to- so let it wash over you."

Hannibal could almost feel the wave that washed down his spine with Will's words. It leaped from the end of his tailbone and into his hips, mechanizing their movement until Hannibal did not have to think of his body. He latched on to Will's words, an infant seeking guidance from nourishing, milk-laden skin; each thoughtless thrust was rewarded by quickening breath and murmured praise.

"It's so simple when you let me lead you. I get what I want and you get to see it happen; now all you need is to do it on command."

So few of those words mattered. So few made it past Hannibal's hammering heart. The occasional sliver of sound entered the shell of his ear, eliciting sated hums with each heavy breath. Hannibal knew Will was pleased with him; this mattered.

Hannibal's responsiveness, however blunt and unfocused, kept Will's voice steady. "You can do it when you kill, yeah? When I give you baths? When you rut on my leg like a bitch in heat?" He finished each phrase with a question, inflection rising and pulling Hannibal's attention up with it. While all spoken between pants, the last words rose into a piercing moan as Hannibal jerked, cock jumping forward in response.

Will yelped, but recovered quickly; his body tensed and relaxed instantly in Hannibal's grip. The wave of movement only intensified the thoughts that sprang to life in Hannibal's mind. Will's arrows struck his very brain stem, their words flying past the metaphorical blood-brain barrier and entering every open synapse.

The vague recollection of just this- lost time and dark desire- came rushing through Hannibal's body at full force. Though crudely twisted by Will's tongue, he remembered the sensations of heat, of untamed ferocity and an urge to move against anything- anything living and breathing and open. Will had been beneath him, then, clothed thigh flush against his cock. He remembered biting, a cry, and clarity; he'd fallen that night, just as Will had in later hours.

Will wanted it from Hannibal, again. He wanted reciprocation, and Hannibal would give it to him; they had agreed.

The prospect of returning to such a state did not seem far now. Hannibal retained some self-awareness amidst the all-encompassing pleasure of Will's thighs, enough to pierce the heavy veil of submission with thought. Even so, he stood contrapposto over the ocean cliffs of control; one shift and he would fall. Hannibal saw himself a tamed beast, urged to ferality by the dried blood of memories on its teeth; he only needed the water below to wash it down his throat.

Will's skin wrapped around his arms as Hannibal tensed, the soft flesh beneath giving.

"Do you remember?" Will asked, voice softening as he attempted to wriggle free. The ripple of Will's lungs as they struggled to escape only urged Hannibal forward, a slip knot over the neck of the restless accused. The bite of Will's false-gentle words only spurred the knot to tighten; salt fell from the soft surface of Will's tongue, coating the tensing muscles of Hannibal's arm with the strength to contract.

He could not hold Will any tighter; only Hannibal's tongue remained loose. He let a response slip through, throat raw from neglect, "Barely."

Will nodded. Hannibal was not sure if the movement came from the rhythm of his body or from agreement, but the gesture communicated acceptance; he relaxed his arms and set Will free.

Will took one reviving breath, then spoke. "Isn't it strange? Like there's something at the back of your mind that you know is there but can't coax out. You want it, and you can't have it, but there's that scratch," Will growled out, taking his nails sharp to the back of Hannibal's head. Where before they had only been tense, now they stung; pain shot down Hannibal's spine and straight to his cock, interrupting its smooth motion as he groaned. Tongue delicately moving in its confines, throat rattling against Hannibal's pounding pleasure, Will purred, "There you go. I can see you now."

Hannibal pulled his head away from Will's nails, but they followed the muscled column of his neck. The touch was not bloody, but scales of skin fell from his nape as Will made a fist. Hannibal hissed, jerking away, but only managed to send his hips rutting frantically into the slickness before him.

"It is a very," Hannibal's voice faltered as he pressed on, body resigning to the inescapable trance of movement, "overwhelming feeling."

Then, they spoke no more. Only slaps and songs echoed throughout the bedroom, muffled by the ocean beyond. As Hannibal climbed closer to release in this quiet, each contraction of muscles grew more violent. The bed wailed in time with Hannibal's force, though Will's symphony-sweet cries overpowered the mere creaking of wood. In the blur of motion, Hannibal sensed Will's chest puff out with pride against his palm, pushing into Hannibal's lungs behind him. He wondered if Will was proud to bring him to his knees; this was not a complete unraveling of free will into instinct, but a close enough approximation for Will to be satisfied. He, the beast, didn't have enough power nor indifference to harm Will just yet; he preserved his mental faculties enough to show Will that he understood just how powerful a gift submission was.

"You're doing so well. So, so good," Will mumbled into the pillow, face pressed against the fabric. The words trailed on like a circle of prayers, with rosary beads of "good," and strands of profanity repeating on a reverent tongue as fingers worshipped their glassy surface. Hannibal held each word close, catching and releasing them in his mind; he wanted to feel them in his hands.

Hannibal paused, eliciting a regretful whimper from his own throat and a cry from Will's. Working quickly, Hannibal slipped his arm beneath Will's head, catching a few wisps of hair on the sweat-slick surface of skin. His wrist settled just beneath the curve of Will's neck, leaving it bent and beautifully limp. Curled fingers cupped Will's jaw, holding it still as Hannibal moved.

Will resumed his songs of praise. Every gasp fell hot against Hannibal's palm, plush lips pressing kisses to its surface; Hannibal bucked his hips with unimaginable power at each swipe of tongue. In a moment of lull as Hannibal prepared to reenter the slick thighs before him, Will bit down on the fleshy mound beneath Hannibal's thumb for leverage.

Hannibal cried out, muffling the yelp as he draped his open, sound-spewing mouth over a notch of Will's spine and sucked at the nerve-filled slope; Will did not respond.

Determined to hear his lover's voice, Hannibal sank his teeth into the delicate flesh, tongue pressing the bone that sheathed the most precious cords of the human body; when no other stimuli could wake a man, pain brought instinct to the surface.

Will released Hannibal's palm from his mouth with a pop. He groaned, shattered and frail against Hannibal's intent, "You need-" he twitched, "a muzzle."

Hannibal immediately shook his head at the thought. A muzzle would keep him from knowing the taste of skin; it would keep him from consuming his beloved. Outrage burned through him; he would make Will know the pleasure of his teeth before they could be pulled from his gums.

Cool air entered Hannibal's mouth as it opened in a snarl. A wave of relief passed through him as Will released his grip on his hair, turned to face him. Stubble brushed roughly against Hannibal's forehead, the scent of worry saturating the sweat at its roots- worry and regret and fear.

Hannibal did not care. The shushing and apologies that poured from Will's mouth soothed him no more; soft words alone could not tame fear-borne violence. He directed his attention to the simple goal of completion, and feigned deafness to keep Will's pleading cries from tearing past his eardrum.

With one confident thrust, the swollen tip of Hannibal's cock caught and lost the pulsing rim of Will's hole. He tried again, fruitlessly, until sheer determination pierced his lover with spear in hand, the ring of muscle pulling Hannibal in. Warmth beckoned him deeper, and slick dribbled from the junction of hole and hilt as he pushed himself into the entirety of his beloved. Muscles tensed around him, pushing and pulling and enveloping his cock until he could not resist the temptation of rhythm.

Hannibal moved- in, out. A second of slow mercy gave way to rushed terror as he began, cock rutting against the current of Will's protest, "Hannibal...".

The plea hung low in the air, a warning that did not reach Hannibal's mind. The sensation blurred all stimuli save for one word, one touch, one piercing cry that went straight through his heart.

"Hannibal!" Will shouted, pairing it with a swift nip to Hannibal's palm.

He froze. This was not a playful yelp; it bore the sting of a harsh reprimand. Will had insulted him countless times, tore him apart and cried out in fear, whimpering in his arms; why, then, did the knot in Hannibal's stomach not burn with passion as it had so many times before? It instead tangled and twisted into a writhing mass, trembling under the slightest show of teeth. The words that had left Will's mouth years before held no bearing on this cry; this was a protest.

Will took the lapse in Hannibal's strength to unwrap himself from the tight limbs around his waist; Hannibal could only watch as he selfishly tore his hips away. Hannibal did not even whimper; he reached for Will, though his grip faltered and caught only air between its fingers.

Will shielded his body. He wrapped his arms across his stomach and sat on his haunches, towering over Hannibal's body still flat on the bed. Will's blood-filled eyes burned with heat and fear as a low rumble slipped past his teeth, taking shape as a great, billowing cloud of threat.

Hannibal remained still. Looking up at the growling creature before him, he knew Will was only defending himself; he admired just how swiftly Will fell into position, movements graceful and organic.

The wave of greed had passed and he was capable of complex admiration now, Hannibal realized. The veil of lust had fallen; he could mend both their wounds with a steady mind.

Silence floated through the room, kept afloat by Will's defensive snarl and Hannibal's Hannibal calmed himself, slowing his labored breathing, and explained in clear words, "I need to tell you that this is too overwhelming. I'm well aware that I am known to enjoy indulging in such bodily pleasures, but this is an exception."

"What you were feeling right now was too overwhelming?" Will asked, genuine curiosity tinging his voice. The spark of warmth quickly faded as he continued, "The feeling that made you-" he grunted in frustration, squeezing his eyes shut and digging clenched fingers into the skin at his sides. "The feeling that made you try to get inside me."

"Submission is a very powerful experience," Hannibal commented, presenting some semblance of an argument for Will to latch onto and ease his pain. Will's ability to see his intentions was unique, though flawed; Will could not understand Hannibal's mind if Hannibal himself did not even understand it.

As Hannibal expected, Will spat bitter words at the wall. "That was the exact opposite of submission. And even if it wasn't like that for you, it's not an excuse for-" he breathed, eyes darting around wildly as the sentence formed in his mind, "Your greed isn't an excuse to hurt me when I didn't ask for it. You're not a thoughtless animal. I didn't tell you to fuck me," he forced out, meeting Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal broke the contact, looking away. "Crossing boundaries is not violating them."

Will nodded, as if truly considering Hannibal's words, but deflected them regardless, "I wanted to cross your boundaries after you crossed mine. But I didn't violate you."

"I can barely control how I respond. That is new and frightening," Hannibal whispered, truth weakening his voice with its strength. Will cocked his head; encouraged by the response, Hannibal gave one more placative, although true, phrase, "I do not want to hurt you."

A hand slipped under Hannibal's chin, its fingers tucking against the bony prominence of his jaw. Will stroked the area with his thumb, speaking thoughtfully, as if to himself, "Not unless I let you."

Hannibal kept his eyes fixed on Will's lips, parted in thought. "I will bite to the bone if you allow me to, but not if you cry out in true fear. This is not foolproof; it's more difficult for me to gauge your response if I cannot even control my own."

Will's teeth came forth in a smile. "Now you see," he sighed. "This is the gift you've given me. You'll see it again whenever we're... intimate. I can predict it but I can't calm it."

Hannibal had misunderstood just how intensely Will wanted him to understand. The mistake gnawed at the ribs around his heart; he could have avoided conflict if only he'd seen the full effect vulnerability had on Will.

The optimism in Will's voice pulled his attention from the depths of his mind into the air around him. "But the difference is, I want to go through it alone; you don't. I'm right here with you, and I'll make sure we don't do this again until you're ready."

Hannibal stayed silent. Will's sudden jump from distress to de-escalation was unusual, though not unpredictable; neither wanted to feed the looming threat of animosity between them, left starving after months of contact. Its hunger for conflict remained, but scraps of peace and joy kept its appetite at bay.

Will had relaxed, sitting back on his haunches and watching Hannibal for a response. Blind to this change, the creature aching for violence still nipped at Hannibal's heels; he did not want to leave the conversation joyful without a proper explanation from Will.

"Was your goal to bring me to a point of mindlessness? Of violence? Of violating consent on several fronts?" Hannibal listed, voice growing firmer with each proposal; he forced it to soften as Will's eyes snapped shut from the volume. "Would it not be simpler to confide in me?"

Tentatively, Will opened his eyes, blinking slowly. "I tried that. You needed to feel it for yourself."

So straightforward an explanation had brought about so many issues; Hannibal almost smiled at its simplicity. "While we cannot escape the equality that comes with reciprocation, we also cannot escape the violence that comes from misunderstanding. Tell me, Will, what do you plan to do about our misunderstandings?"

"We can control them. We can tame and use them to our advantage."

Hannibal lifted his finger to point at Will, hanging the index loosely in the air as he spoke, "You weaponised your empathy and my blindness to it. I needed to experience it through my own pain; you feel so deeply that mere words cannot communicate your pain."

Will closed his eyes and nodded, then lowered himself to the mattress. Hannibal could feel the tension in Will's limbs fall away, taking his own wariness with it. Welcoming Will's ease, he commented, "Your reaction to my penetration was glorious- one of primal fear. While I crave to see it many times more, I truly want to know you enjoy what I am doing."

Will licked his lips; Hannibal tracked his tongue as it caught on a single tooth before disappearing into its home. "If I'll be in a position to answer you somehow, I will if you ask- speech, sign, or just nodding." Will took the covers in hand and tucked them tight against his chest. They rose and fell as he spoke, though on gentle breaths, "If it comes to it, I'll hurt you. There's a point where I can't control myself, either. But if I know what's coming, and you know what you'll do, then I won't have to control myself."

Satisfied with the shiver this reply sent down his spine, Hannibal joined Will beneath the cloak of the covers. "I see why we both fear losing that control; it is sinfully tempting. I will stop if you are unresponsive or if your response is negative."

"Isn't that hard to establish things beforehand, is it?" Will asked with a yawn, almost mocking Hannibal's failure to do so.

Hannibal ignored the hint of disdain, opting instead to reintroduce his lips to Will's chest. Will sighed at the touch, forgiveness seeping through his skin; Hannibal lapped it up from Will's steadily hardening nipple with a fervor reserved for only the gods' ambrosia.

"A discussion of this nature is certainly more pleasant than catching each other unguarded," Hannibal hummed against Will's pleased sighs. He took his mouth from his love's sweet skin

and placed it on a pillow, mumbling weary words into the fabric, "We should rest after the exertion such a momentous capture brings."

"Talk more tomorrow?"

Turning his head to make his words clearer, Hannibal agreed, "We can establish firm rules in the morning. As you said last night: 'guidance and empathy'. I will let you interact with the environment at your own pace."

Will turned his back to Hannibal, curling his legs up towards his chest. Hannibal admired the gentle dip of his hips and the flutter of his ribs as Will spoke his last words before morning, "Let's work from there. I want full control in my vulnerability, and you don't want to be alone with it."

Hannibal did not have to wrestle with layer upon layer of meaning, of fear; he could make an arrangement with Will. They could speak freely and understand and establish all that needed to be established; there was a deep peace to such freeing constraints.

As Hannibal opened his mouth to speak of the joy burning in his throat, a gentle snore rose into the air. He let it echo against the walls of the bedroom, fading and falling into emptiness. The sound sent an arrow through his heart; Hannibal was alone in consciousness.

Resigned to the situation, he settled against Will's back. He took Will into his arms and weaved his legs between the other man's; he could not avoid how effortlessly his cock slid between Will's thighs. He would have assumed it had found a home in its true sheath, had the muscles not tensed for a single moment, drawing new pleasure from his cock.

Without hesitation, Hannibal gave a few frenzied thrusts before he could not keep from barreling over the cliff of orgasm. Hannibal willed his muscles to relax, forcefully quieting their movements with a deep breath. He took his hands from Will's skin so as to not tear into the tender flesh, letting them drop to the mattress. His hips jerked in quick spasms; they were the only area he could not keep from rejoicing in his release. The sensation swirled in his stomach for a hollow second, disappearing without traveling its well-worn path through each and every nerve.

Deprived of it as quickly as it had arrived, Hannibal did not ache from his pleasure's departure. With no contribution from Will, it had been empty, soulless; he instead celebrated the warmth that welcomed his return to Will's sleeping form.

Hannibal could not tell if Will had felt the electricity spark and fade in his body, but the soft sigh that escaped the man's chest eased his fears. He heard Will's sleep-clumsy lips part to mouth fragments of indecipherable, mumbling speech before falling silent. He buried his face in Will's neck, letting the hairs at its nape brush against his nose; Will smelled of calm once more.

Satisfied with this development, Hannibal surrendered awareness of his breath to night's oscillating lull. Even if the starless skies above Hannibal held him in paralysis, he would be grateful for its immobilization- for a night without Will, be it with pleasure or without, was a night still as death.

The ocean at the cliffside reflected more light than in the city, Hannibal observed as he found a steady stone on which to keep his balance. The surface was thankfully dry- a gift in the face of danger, but a punishment to the softened soles of his feet. Though he'd regained enough strength to run, the precision with which he needed to place his heel into a rocky divot had not returned to his legs. On a successful attempt, the sharp peaks inherent to stone tore at his callous-free flesh and drew blood. Hannibal hissed through his teeth as the blood of the previous step trickled forth, but his pain quickly faded as the ocean's rippling light overpowered his sense of touch.

Will had paused as well, face turned seawards. Hannibal caught a glimmer of fierce light reflected in Will's eyes; the fractal pierced his shallow iris, boring a hole deeper than the ocean into the constricted pupil. Will blinked, lids flinching from the bright intrusion but body motionless in thought.

How Hannibal wished he could peer inside Will's mind! He envied Will's consciousness- the genesis of every thought and instinct that traveled from core to cortex. He envied the muscles that responded to his mere wish, and the heart that beat due to his very existence, nestled in the shelter of his ribs. He could neither fuse himself to Will's sulci and gyri, nor know the extent of Will's thoughts when his eyes glazed over and his mouth fell open in wonder, no- but he could bear witness to the divine vision of such a miracle.

Though he would stare at Will for an eternity, the man had not moved for a concerning amount of time, caught in light's grasp. Hannibal stepped forward to pull Will's eyes to their periphery. He winced as another jutting edge scraped against his foot, closing his eyes only to snap them open as the ground flew ever-closer to his face. Hannibal felt his chest jump with a gasp and his arm extending in reflex, catching the one thing that stood solid before him.

Will's hand snapped closed like sure jaws on prey, eager to hold the curious creature that fell into the gaping maw. This capture, though, was not to consume, but to protect; Will turned around instantly and clasped his other hand over Hannibal's quivering fingers.

"Be careful," Will uttered, tongue blunt with a surge of fear.

Hannibal took hold of Will's arm, letting the weight of his body hang from the pillar for a moment before he found his balance. Brushing pebbles from his jacket, he defended his abilities, "Trust me, dear Will, I am careful, but I do not yet have the precise coordination necessary to scale this cliff alone."

Will's hand lingered on Hannibal's back, clenching into a fist as he rephrased his words, "I know. I'll catch you, just-" his hand fell from Hannibal's back to his wrist, eyebrows raising at the birth of an idea, "Hold my hand. It'll be easier."

Hannibal tilted his head, a smile playing on his lips, "I cannot object to such a thoughtful offer."

And so they descended the cliffs, hand in hand, step after step. Will seemed more a beacon of strength the nearer Hannibal got to the shore, keeping him upright and steadying his uneven

gait; he was thankful for this quiet solidarity.

Will leaped from the final rock onto the soft sand below, tugging Hannibal forward with him. Hannibal squeezed Will's hand tightly, holding the man back as he took a moment to cautiously plant his toes on the sand, burrowing into it slightly for a better hold. When both men at last met flat, stable ground, Will started forward once more towards the sea.

"I like that we can look at it here from a controlled distance. We don't depend on the ocean for our safety or survival anymore," he mused, head turning to Hannibal every few words. As they neared the water, Will paused, letting Hannibal and himself stand at the gradient between dry and wet earth. Hannibal mourned how Will's hand let him go, hanging limp at his side as Will sighed, "I can just admire it."

Likewise, Hannibal admired how Will's hair jumped in the violent wind. He imagined its force would carry his voice away from even Will's hyperacute sense of hearing; Hannibal stepped towards him, whispering against the shell of Will's ear, "The ocean moves many people emotionally. Crowds flock to the sea year-round to escape the burdens of land, though I believe it wrings a more visceral reaction from my person than from any other besides yourself?"

Hannibal welcomed Will's nose against his cheek as the man admitted, "I don't think I can ever sail alone, again."

He hummed in understanding. Will had grown accustomed to his presence, and could not bear to leave the man without him. Though this was quite the achievement, Hannibal found a shred of humility in his heart as he searched for common ground, "And I, swim."

Will's head twitched against his cheek with surprise. "Not even for some fun?"

"Not unless you join me."

"Don't mind me asking, Doctor, but are you afraid of the water because of your past experiences?" Will teased, twirling his hand at his last words.

"No," Hannibal smiled, acknowledging Will's playful mockery of his therapy. "I simply do not want to be a passive bystander to my own enjoyment, just as you cannot set sail on your own. You, dear Will, can assure me of that."

"You want me to watch you swim?"

Hannibal let his throat scrape against itself, roughening his voice, though his words remained light in their delivery, "I want you to watch me drown, and revive me once my lungs fill with water."

Will turned his gaze seawards, inching forward to leave Hannibal admiring the ruffled curls at his neck. His voice, muffled by distance, still rang in Hannibal's ears ever-sweet as Will responded.

"We're different, then; I want you to let me drown. I'll bring myself up to the surface," he recoiled as a lone wave graced his leg, stepping back to face Hannibal, "and you'll be watching all of it."

Will dropped to the ground unceremoniously, pulling his knees to his chest and sighing. Hannibal, still caught in the net of Will's words, continued, "I'll watch you rise like the beautiful Chloris, swept into godhood choking on her own flower seeds until she learned to sow them."

"Not like that," Will shook his head, nose scrunching with distaste.

"If not Chloris, then what are you?" Hannibal asked, imbuing the question with gentle, yet prodding, curiosity. He tracked the steady disappearance of Will's foot as the man dug it into the sand, molding the earth around himself until his ankle sat stiff beneath its weight.

"I'm Ganymede, Cupbearer of Zeus. Taken for who I am- not for what I could potentially be."

Hannibal lowered himself to the ground, knees meeting the sand at Will's feet. He cupped his hands, scooping up a generous mound of sand and adding it to the slope above Will's foot. He patted the area down, anchoring the limb in place with a firm press and a satisfied hum from Will. "No longer am I Zephyr, but Zeus, nourished by your very presence."

"Seems so," Will sighed, head falling as his voice turned mournful. "If only we didn't have to violate each other to live as gods. We only remember Zeus for his power and all the women he took against their will; we don't recognize Leda without her swan or Daphne without Apollo."

No apology could mend the wound Hannibal had opened, and the tranquil saltwater around them only burned its healing skin. While time could not reverse, scars could be tended to with care; Hannibal brought a medic's hand to Will's grievances. "We cannot control our transformation to godhood, but we can control our reign over man and beast. Our legacy need not live on through our vile acts, but through our divine ones."

"Depends on what's divine."

"Often, what is vile to many is divine to some, and vice versa. But I believe we can both agree on what is a divine act if we are divine ourselves."

Will remained expressionless. "Gods can disagree."

"We are joined by more than divinity; we have the benefit of knowledge of the flesh. Why should gods fight if they know the damage it causes man?"

Will sat silent, brushing the sand from his hands; Hannibal did the same. He'd been prying a translucent grain from beneath his fingernail when Will's response startled him with its confident volume.

"Guidance and empathy," he declared, chin lifted proudly towards the sea. "That's what I want from you. All I need is one hand pointing to where I need to go."

"And not the freedom to do as you wish?"

"I'll choose whether I follow, of course."

"Of course. A bold choice, but admirable, nonetheless," Hannibal nodded, standing with a grunt. Will looked up at him, the whites of his eyes shining below bright blue pupils. His head tilted slightly to the side, Will looked an eager creature, preening at the approval and awaiting more; Hannibal obliged. "If you should choose not to follow, what would be the appropriate response?"

"If a gentle reprimand doesn't work, let me go. I'll come back eventually," Will stated matter-of-factly.

The lightness in his voice brought a cloud of fondness to Hannibal's chest. Will wanted to be released and then come when called, all to feel the thrill of choice- to lose his shackles and wander as he pleased. Hannibal pondered keeping the observation to himself, but voiced it aloud to see if Will's eyes would grow wide with self-awareness. He walked back and forth along the shoreline, mobile before the sand-bound man below as he spoke, "You want the illusion of structure for comfort, veiling the choice to move freely."

Will tilted his head in thought. "I wouldn't be opposed to more structure, really. I just need to like it and know what we want to do in advance." He paused, face cold for a moment before it warmed with a smile, "The 'illusion of structure' you say I want only veils one thing: free will."

"Your namesake," Hannibal commented, earning an amused huff in response. He carried on. "I will always give you a brief summary of my plans and the choice to reject them, but you will not know all. You may reject something quite pleasurable through your caution."

"Not exciting enough just to know what's coming?"

"It is exciting, yes, but there will be greater compensation for your efforts, so to say, if you do not. Your anxiety rises when you are faced with the unexpected; if you bear this burden, you will be rewarded," Hannibal proposed, meeting Will's eyes at his last word. The man's gaze was fixed on his face, now, absorbing every word with rapt attention. "If you do as you are told, would praise and pleasure be sufficient rewards? I do not want you to feel cornered."

Will opened his mouth to speak, but Hannibal cut off his song with a question, "Can you move your foot from its confines?"

Hannibal watched with satisfaction as Will's expression turned to one of subtle embarrassment at not having noticed his misfortune. The man smiled, the mound around his leg wiggling as he shifted. "Those would be-" Will grunted, launching himself backwards from the force of pulling his roots from the earth, "adequate rewards." He stood and shook the sand from his legs with a few firm stomps.

Knowing Will would follow, Hannibal turned seawards and started forward. He halted mid-step as Will's voice came from far behind, nearly a shout, "But don't project your own wants onto me, Hannibal. We can make sure you're not cornered; I'm not afraid of it."

Hannibal suppressed a wince at Will's smugness, the movement manifesting instead as a snarl that clawed at his throat. He turned to face Will, managing to calm the bristling hairs at the base of his neck as he responded, "I am amazed by your ability to know me. I can no longer lie; you see through my attempts."

Will did not move, tilting his head in anticipation of more. Hannibal caved to the gentle fall of curls over the man's eyes, the brilliant shine of pupils piercing the thick strands. He let out a heavy sigh, admitting, "I do not want to be forced into a position in which I have no choice but to escape."

As Will came closer, his voice grew quieter and quieter until it tapered off into a whisper. "If you want to run, you'll have time to come back. Just tell me."

Will did not say he'd keep Hannibal from feeling trapped; this technicality pulled a shiver of intrigued unease from Hannibal's spine. Still, Will provided comfort; he'd be able to leave in exchange for the nourishment of warning.

"I will alert you with a sign," Hannibal offered with a nod; Will returned the gesture.

Their conversation the night before had fallen into one of metaphor and mauling teeth, overshadowed by torn flesh and fresh wounds. Hannibal felt the gnawing urge to phrase his qualms simply, away from blood-soaked bedrooms and divine violation. The teeth that sat in his stomach did not belong to a beast; they grazed his insides with dull, never-ending strokes, boring a throbbing hole that only the flattened molars of man could create.

"I want to apologize for leaving you at Sordino's."

Hannibal enjoyed how Will's brows knit together with his words. The man licked his lips, holding his tongue between his teeth before it disappeared into the black of his mouth. When Will did not have to search through layers of metaphor and seas of symbolism, his reactions came faster, stronger; Hannibal adored it.

"I understand. But you came back," Will murmured into the crook of Hannibal's neck, at his side at last. "All you have to do is tell me and come back. It's the least I can do- forgiving that. You waited three years for me to come back, and longer to love me alone." The man rested his chin atop Hannibal's shoulder, its weight pulling Hannibal sideways by precious millimetres.

"I have found that when cornered, my first instinct is to either hide or cause damage. It seems hiding has become more favorable for my mind."

"Better for the both of us," Will sighed, running his hand down his face as he flew from his perch on Hannibal's shoulder. Will's hand ghosted his arm as it fell; Hannibal wanted to hold it, to wrap his fingers around its wrist, but the gesture seemed terribly mundane in comparison to all that had come before it.

Will straightened himself. "Fight or flight- I don't care. You shouldn't be afraid to let me know."

"Do you think I would be afraid?" Hannibal asked, eyes narrowing at such a common assumption, applied only to mere mortals.

"You never warn me. It's like you're fighting it until the last minute; until neither you nor I can do anything."

Even now, Hannibal felt the twine around his wings breaking his bones, digging into their marrow until their frenzied flapping flung him into the skies. What Will said became true; had it been there for all eternity? Had Will pulled it from the depths, or was Will only its creator?

Hannibal did not bother with these questions as a gentle breeze blew them away. He could not deny the statement's truth, but he could defend his actions. "It's quite challenging to predict, I assure you."

"Let me know. Or take me with you- doesn't matter," Will huffed out, shutting his eyes and opening them to meet Hannibal's. Hannibal felt his own glowing with anticipation just as Will's had at his suggestions; he listened eagerly to the sweet sounds that spilled from Will's mouth in succession. "Come," the man called as he swung his head toward the sea, "and enjoy what we have. Don't run from it."

"I won't run; not unless you run by my side. What am I in that situation, if not Zephyr, your captor?" Hannibal asked, waiting for the voice behind him to speak of violation and captivity.

"Something terribly beautiful wearing the skin of a man."

Hannibal resisted the urge to turn around. He let a shallow, broken-glass wave flow over his feet, dousing them in cold, clean tears of embrace. He let out an involuntary shiver in response; his next words rode the tail of the tremor. "And you, a man wearing the skin of something terribly beautiful."

"Was, once. Now I'm just something terribly beautiful," Will shouted against the gentle crash of waves that surrounded Hannibal's ears.

All was quiet save for the gurgling, spitting water. Will's scent, carried thick on the salty wind, met Hannibal's nose before he could even see the man in his periphery.

"I may not fear the sea, but it makes me uneasy."

"Terribly beautiful, isn't it?" Will mused, voice still a few steps behind.

Hannibal dared not ask if Will was referring to his unease, or the water itself. He descended into the sea until waves broke against his shins in little, white-tipped climaxes.

After too unbearable a stretch of time without Will's image, he looked back to find his love, gaze distant before catching his eyes. He watched Will's toes curl as the frigid water lapped at their soft pads. Calling his beloved close, Hannibal extended his hand; Will took it.

"I encourage you to trust my strength, although I cannot promise you stability in body," Hannibal admitted, realizing that he could only let Will follow safely in metaphor, and not in step, without his full strength.

"If we fall, we fall. One more can't hurt that much."

Will shuddered behind him as the water reached the tops of their thighs. Hannibal felt the cold-spurred ascent of hair on his legs, but found relief as Will's scent seeped into the boundless sea. The new wounds on their flesh stung from the salt, but their shared heat comforted Hannibal; only Will's warmth could overcome the currents themselves.

Chapter End Notes

and so we end our very long set-up for pet play.

i am still awfully new to writing smut and the such, but i am having a grand old time doing it. things have been rough mentally and emotionally as of late, but this fic brings me so much joy. i hope all of you enjoy it as much as i do!

cheers :)

Conception

Chapter Summary

"How would you feel about eating from my hand?"

"Like a dog," Will commented, eyes finding their way back to his meal. Hannibal's reference was obvious- no man would kneel to consume another's skin.

"Do you want me to refer to it that way?"

Will swallowed down a growl, instead putting his thoughts into words made for human lips. "Would a man trust anybody enough to eat straight from their palm?"

"What do you think, Will?"

"No. Not even you, half-beast," he replied, voice harsh on the last word. Hannibal smiled, amused, much to Will's satisfaction; his expression fell as Will added, "But I would."

Chapter Notes

I added this to the tags a bit earlier, but this chapter contains mentions of assault. Nothing graphic or detailed, just mentions/allusions to it, but feel free to skip. Starts at "Will barely kept a grin of satisfaction from running across his face," and ends at "Will dug his fingers into Hannibal's hair, his nails abandoning flakes of skin in their wake."

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"You actually eat normal beef every once in a while?" Will jabbed as he pulled Hannibal's chair back, guiding the man by his arm to the dinner table.

As Hannibal sat against the creaking chair, Will made his journey across the length of the table. His fingers dragged against the surface, tips catching the subtle imperfections common to wood. He counted each one- three dark knots until he slipped into his seat across from Hannibal.

"I select my cuts not by quality, but often by rudeness. It is purely my cooking that makes them delicious in spite of their bitterness," the cannibal replied, taking his knife and testing the meat's give. Both utensils in hand, he cut into the flesh, lifting a piece to eye level and inspecting its interior. Will caught a nod of approval and watched as Hannibal slid the meat

into his mouth. His lips lingered on the fork's prongs, teeth carefully keeping from clacking against the metal.

Hannibal set down his fork, then his knife, then swallowed to speak. "In the case of true animal meat, however, the care a farmer gives his livestock implants itself on the flesh; a happy cow makes for a fine steak, and even finer if I prepare it."

Will's own knife cut into the steak with relative ease- rough upon entry, soft through the center, and jagged once more at the bottom. He twirled it around on his fork once, twice, before taking it whole.

He could barely keep his lips from shining with saliva in response to the flavor- slightly smoked, tender with pale-blood flesh inside; the cut was perfect.

Will's words threatened to escape from his mouth before he even swallowed. He resisted the urge, though, chasing the swallowing spasm of his throat with speech, "Must've been one happy cow. It's fantastic, Hannibal," he pushed out, eagerly returning to slicing his steak.

"It's been several years since you've tasted my cooking; I hope you will react to every new dish with the same ardour."

"If it'll taste like this," Will paused for another forkful, "then I'd let you feed me three meals a day, every day."

"I promise it will taste even better, dear Will," Hannibal smiled.

Will lowered his eyes to his own plate, anchoring them to the slab of meat before him. The fading sunset coated one side yellow-orange, though the sun's rays fell brown on the surface. The same light caught his fork's metal angles, sending fiery sparks into his furiously-blinking eyes. Avoiding the threatening shine, Will closed his eyes, instead tracking the diffused glow behind his eyelids as he chewed.

"How would you feel about eating this meat from the meat of my hand?"

"Hm?" Will hummed, gaze shooting upwards to Hannibal's grease-shiny lips. He'd failed to notice how Hannibal had gone silent, fork ceasing its clatter against the plate and its partner, the knife.

"How would you feel about eating from my hand?"

"Like a dog," Will commented, eyes finding their way back to his meal. Hannibal's reference was obvious- no man would kneel to consume another's skin- but the cannibal tilted his head with mild surprise. Will kept a frustrated shudder from crawling up his spine at Hannibal's response.

"Do you want me to refer to it that way?" Hannibal questioned, soft with caution; Will wondered if he sensed the hostility growing hot in his stomach. Hannibal's mild curiosity at the comment was telling; he hadn't expected the words to leave Will's mouth.

Will plucked an acceptable answer out of the air- a question to pull more of Hannibal's thoughts to the surface. He swallowed down a growl, instead putting his thoughts into words made for human lips. "Would a man trust anybody enough to eat straight from their palm?"

"What do you think, Will?"

Will swallowed again, though nothing slid down his throat except buzzing frustration. He had to answer his own question, now; such was the consequence of avoidance. "No. Not even you, half-beast," he replied, voice harsh on the last word. Hannibal smiled, amused, much to Will's satisfaction; his expression fell as Will added, "But I would."

Hannibal's eyes closed for a moment, leaving Will staring at an unusually placid face. The man's pupils moved behind his eyelids- thinking, maybe.

Hannibal opened them, bright and awaiting direction. "Go on," the cannibal encouraged, leaving Will a preacher in the pulpit to his enthralled congregation.

"I know the metaphor of being an animal really fits what you want us to be- instinct, blood, hedonism. But I think taking it more literally would be," he took a deep breath, suppressing a shiver, "interesting."

"What do you suggest?"

A clock ticked from the living room, thrumming in his ears ever-steady as Will spoke. "You can keep me on a leash. Feed me. Simple things- less symbolic than collars." Each idea became real and tangible with Hannibal's question, no longer veiled by abstraction. He listed each one from inside his mind's eye, ghosts of sensation surrounding his body; Will felt the tug of a leash against his throat, the gentle caress of a hand under his chin. He fought to suppress yet another spasm of excitement, but failed, the urge making the hairs at his nape stand on end.

Hannibal nodded, thinking to himself, "Your behavior is quite canine when you fight submission. Once you accept it, though, you are very tame; dare I say, a domesticated beast."

"I feel like an obedient dog," Will huffed, letting a cracked whimper of disbelief slip through his excitement. Obedience wasn't unpleasant; that was its horror. He didn't fear it, or even feel a great need to deny Hannibal the pleasure of his obedience. He did find pleasure in fighting it, yes- in the tease of teeth and strangled snarls- but even sweeter was submission's simplicity. The tug of the collar and the call of disobedience were equally as strong; all that swayed Will one way or another was the warm hand at his neck, there to pull him close.

Will set down his fork, finally allowing his hands to rest, splayed out on the table at either side of his plate. He watched them tremble as Hannibal spoke, placing a snare of sharp, enticing words around his neck.

"Unable to ignore the words of your master, you come when called," Hannibal mused, eyeing Will's newly-exposed hands. Will saw how the pupils jumped with each twitch of his fingers; he curled them into fists in defense, watching as Hannibal's gaze melted into their very palms.

"Have you ever owned a dog?" he asked, tentatively unfurling his hands once more; no good would come from baring his teeth. He would entertain Hannibal's attempts to hold his leash-only if the cannibal's grip held true.

"You will be the first," Hannibal admitted, glancing away before taking a hesitant breath, asking, "Will you be a good boy for me, Will?"

Will felt his lip curl up in distaste, an immediate reaction; he almost snarled in response, "Don't say it like that; it's artificial."

"What do you want me to say, then?"

Will's pinprick of anger quickly faded into merciful amusement; Hannibal was searching for guidance. Will extended a metaphorical tendril of empathy, feeling around Hannibal's bony exterior to find nothing but flesh beneath; the cannibal wanted to feel as much skin against his as Will did.

If they were to function as one, each had to know their place. Both canine and keeper had to understand their mutual dynamic; only then did order remain.

"Sit. Stay. Heel," Will rattled off, voice lowering as the implications of the next command came to him, hot on his skin, "Up."

Hannibal's brows flew up with the motion of Will's finger, though the rest of him remained still. Warm satisfaction grew in Will's chest, rolling in waves until it passed through his groin; Hannibal had sensed a change in direction. Hannibal had an advantage, Will knew; he'd be able to smell his growing arousal as soon as it bloomed.

Hannibal's eyes flicked to Will's face. Their pupils were pools of black, irises barely visible against the blown-wide void. All that betrayed their humanity was the reflection of purpling sunlight on their glossy surface.

"A dog wouldn't sit at the table, unless it is a remarkably spoiled pet," Hannibal stated coolly, voice even and controlled.

"No," Will breathed, awaiting any words that would lead him towards a warm hand.

"I will not spoil you, then. If you want to eat like a dog, Will, you must act like one. Where would a dog sit, if it were to eat from its owner's hand?"

Will pondered the question, considering the many options Hannibal had presented to him. He could sit under the table begging for scraps, in the corner of the room far from Hannibal, right at his side, and many more; Will was grateful for the ability to choose.

Even so, he didn't need the wealth of choices; he would lay at Hannibal's feet, regardless.

"Beside your chair."

Hannibal did not spare a moment as he commanded, "Sit, Will."

Fire sparked in Will's stomach, rapidly doused by the practical steps involved in his descent. Slowly, with great care, Will pushed back his chair and slid to the ground. As he descended, Hannibal's head disappeared, giving way to the grounding pillars of his legs. His head pressed up against the table, Will could do no more than move on his hands and knees; he planted them on the rug and rolled his shoulders, adjusting. The movement spurred him forward, and Will crawled to the other side of the table.

As Hannibal's chair grew larger, coming closer, the knot of anticipation in Will's stomach tightened. It shrunk in its tightness, pulled small by agile fingers; all of its force fell upon one point, one fear- Hannibal's next decision.

The shadow cloaking Will's body disappeared as new light graced his head. He looked up to see Hannibal's form haloed by a ceiling lamp; the man did not spare him even a glance.

Cautiously, aware of his legs' awkward tread and foreign center of mass, Will brushed past Hannibal's chair to seat himself at its side. He sat up, tucking his legs beneath him and placing his hands on his thighs- a simple position of servitude.

Bloody, stiff hunger pooled between Will's legs, the final remnants of a dying flame.

Hannibal remained silent and continued to eat.

Will flexed his fingers, flinching with each click of their many joints; he rolled them into a fist, anchoring himself firmly to his own body. The pressure gave him a point of focus besides the wall clock, the gentle scrape of cutlery against porcelain- and Hannibal's satisfied humming with each bite. The sound tugged at tense strings low in his stomach, a bow on bright, piercing strings. It came and went, back and forth, until Will could not suppress the gentle moans that spilled from his throat in time with Hannibal's. The cannibal's rhythm only ceased for a millisecond with each of Will's labored breaths.

It seemed an eternity until Hannibal's even cutting truly broke pattern. Every stroke took longer, each individual cut precise and measured. Hannibal placed his fork on the table, taking a piece of steak between his thumb and index. He looked at Will, then lowered his hand. Will watched the morsel with eager eyes as it stopped just before his mouth.

"I want to be very clear; these are your commands. I will rarely say them verbally so you will need to be visually alert. As this is only for me to determine how you will behave, you may just listen and disregard vision for a moment."

Although Hannibal had given him permission to pay attention through sound alone, Will couldn't tear his eyes from the meat held in front of him. A thin red strip poked through its center, soft and compressed by Hannibal's grip.

"First, you will take food from between my fingers. This will teach you that my hand will not hurt you and cannot grab you when it is occupied. I will say or sign 'finger,' and you will do this."

The meat remained exposed to air for only a second before Hannibal said, quiet and controlled, "Finger."

Will darted forward, lips closing around Hannibal's thumb and forefinger, tongue pulling the steak from the surrounding meat. He kept his teeth from scraping Hannibal's skin, though caught the soft pad of a fingertip between his canines as he bit down to chew.

Hannibal didn't pull his hand away; he only let out a muffled gasp. Will looked up with wide, guilty eyes, though was met with relieving mild amusement.

"Although you may require training in grace and agility, it is not my main concern. Your training will focus on obedience."

Will nodded, slowly letting the saliva-coated fingers slide from his lips. He bit down again, this time met with blood and fluid richer than what had been on his plate minutes earlier; he couldn't tell if it was Hannibal's touch, or his excited tongue that made his mouth water with anticipation bite after bite.

"Finger."

Again, Will took his food. Careful not to take Hannibal's finger into his mouth again, Will let his tongue wrap around the digits in soft, luxuriating strokes; Hannibal's finger twitched in response.

As Will chewed, enjoying how the muscle fibers dissolved under the force of his jaws, Hannibal's gaze rested on his lips.

"Is your intention to arouse me with your tongue?"

Will tilted his head in confusion, replying around a mouthful of flesh, "Don't wanna hurt you."

Hannibal blinked slowly, processing the response, before a humbled yet pleased smile settled across his features. "It seems I embody the common Freudian theory of projection. Good, Will. You are a loyal dog." As Will swallowed, Hannibal turned back, eyes jumping from place to place, "Do you not consider resisting? You are unusually compliant compared to the previous days' behavior."

"The food is good, and I want to eat it. Resisting won't get me anything," Will admitted, relishing the smirk Hannibal gave at the manipulative implication veiled behind honesty.

"And obeying will?"

Will knew Hannibal didn't see his own smile in return as the man placed yet another piece of food in front of him.

"Finger."

Piece after piece, Will took and savored what Hannibal gave him. Each stroke of Hannibal's knife-blade against meat had become predictable; Will felt his head bobbing back and forth, taking each piece with rhythm.

As quickly as it had appeared, the pattern broke once more. Just as Will leaned forward to eat, Hannibal rolled the new morsel of meat from his fingers to the center of his hand. Will's teeth clicked closed on empty air, resonating through his skull.

"Palm," Hannibal offered, laying his hand flat beneath Will's nose and giving it an encouraging nudge closer to his mouth.

Will eyed the steak warily. If he took the piece, Hannibal's hand could close around him; this was different from taking it by finger. As Will leaned ever-closer, he knew no harm had come to him before this; it was a risk he could afford to take.

Will rested his chin atop Hannibal's fingers and ate what sat in his palm. As he chewed, Hannibal scratched his chin; Will closed his eyes and sighed, simple pleasure crawling from his loved throat to the tips of his toes.

"Very good. Let us try once more," Hannibal praised, placing another piece of meat in his hand. "Palm."

Will ate it with remarkable speed, eager to feel Hannibal's warm fingers against his stubble-rough jaw. The soft skin of his cheek melted into the touch, easily molded into a smile by the learned fingers around it. Will brushed himself against Hannibal's palm, hungry for the contact; much to his dismay, though, a thin film of grease stuck to his mouth. Will poked out his tongue to clean it, but couldn't reach. Only then did he notice the grease-laden drag of Hannibal's hand against his cheek, and the seasonings that clung to Hannibal's palm. Will wrinkled his nose, letting out a panicked whimper as he tore his head away from the cannibal's touch. He brought his hands to his face, trying to rub away everything that clung to it, but to no avail.

As the room's silence dawned on him, Will looked up in anticipation of anger.

The hand did not chase him. Hannibal waited silently, eyes moving from Will's own to the frantic curled hands that clawed at his face.

Gulping in unsteady breaths, Will managed to whine out, "I don't want to eat like this." With a few more breaths in time with the clock, his heart slowed; Will calmed his twitching hands to its beat, rooting them to his thighs as Hannibal eyed them.

"Good, Will. I was waiting for you to calm yourself. It is not my duty to regulate your emotions; I may only influence them. Now tell me, why don't you want to do this?"

"Fingers are better. Not messy," he whispered, brushing his face against the shoulder of his woolen sweater. The fibers scratched against his neck, taking particles of food with flakes of skin from Will's cheek.

"Ah," Hannibal hummed, standing from his chair and turning towards the kitchen. Will flinched ever-gently as Hannibal bent down to eye-level. He noticed how Hannibal kept his hands clasped together, far from Will's face; seeing this, Will let himself move forward infinitesimally. No harm could come from closed hands.

"I will return in a moment with a bowl suitable for your needs."

Will stared into Hannibal's worried eyes, feeling nothing but genuine concern spilling from their pupils. He remembered the ghostly twinge of guilt that once would have made its claim in his chest, but found he could not hold its spirit. All he found was comfort; Hannibal would return, Hannibal would help.

Bitter tears tore open his throat as he struggled to keep down a desperate sound. So foreign a feeling, made of joy and disbelief, made itself known in a desperate, aimless cry.

His keeper rushed away without a second glance. Defeated, Will waited.

Against the ticking of the clock, Will's thighs trembled enough to overcome the metronomic sound. He bore the burden of devoted submission a single, heavy-breath second before he gave in to comfort. He unfolded one leg, the other, and lowered himself to the ground until his hair, static-fueled, clung to the carpet. He rolled onto his side and let Earth's loving weight hold him still.

The world seemed calmer, through one eye. It didn't have the complex depth known so dearly to man, nor the overpowering vastness of a landscape; one eye, one vertical view, and one concern: blinking turned the world black.

Peace inhabited this darkness; Will didn't have to concern himself with the world outside his mind with his eyes closed. He could only hear the ticking of a clock, second after second, and the faraway clattering of dishes from the kitchen. Blind, he found the carpet soft enough that it wouldn't prick his face; Will brushed his cheek against the weave until the hum of footsteps filled his cathedral-hollow mouth, echoing like a choir.

"Will."

Hannibal's low, quiet voice soothed him, and knowing that the cannibal even regarded his comfort was comfort in and of itself. He did not lift his head nor open his eyes; Will waited and listened for the world to turn around him.

"I have a platform so you can eat while sitting."

Will sensed the two-time thud of knees hitting the floor as something large and flat rustled the carpet. His nose twitched at the scent of food wafting towards him; he cracked open one eye just in time to see Hannibal's hand rushing forward. Its fingers slipped between his cheek and the carpet, lifting Will's head up in one smooth motion. Hannibal turned it left, right, thumb planted firmly on his jaw; Will whimpered as one eye neglected to adjust to the room's brightness after a life in plush darkness.

Hannibal let him go; Will let his head fall back with a muffled thud, letting out another whine of protest. He would not object to being handled, but he would also not move from his shelter on the ground; this was the price Hannibal would have to accept.

"Just the bowl, then," Hannibal breathed, one hand nestled in Will's curls, the other removing a ceramic bowl from atop an elevated platform. Made of gentle brown, Will nosed closer to

the object to inspect the warm meal inside.

"We also have metal bowls, but those would be cool to the touch. I warmed this one beforehand; I hope you find it suitable," Hannibal commented as he slid his hand from Will's hair down his back. Will shivered, an insignificant instinctual response as he eyed the steak before him. He hovered over it, positioning himself to perfection, before Hannibal jerked his head away, knuckles fisted in his hair.

Will opened his mouth to whine out a complaint, but a towel pressed to his lips stifled the sound. It ran across his face, under his chin and at the corners of his mouth; Hannibal rubbed it into his skin until it burned with fresh cleanliness.

Will shook his head loose as Hannibal's grip weakened, ridding his face of the dampness and returning to his place at the bowl. Hannibal snapped his fingers, pulling a frustrated growl from Will's throat at the next interruption to his meal. Will's eyes darted to Hannibal's face with restless jumps, leaping from bowl to hand to face.

"Pay attention. Here is a new towel if you may need it," Hannibal whispered, voice seeping into Will's crawling skin.

He couldn't stay agitated with Hannibal's effort presented before him so plainly; he meant no harm. He looked to the towel, then to Hannibal, then to his hands, lifting one gingerly into the air as he asked with a tilt of the head, "Paws?"

Hannibal leaned forward, grabbing his wrist and giving it a squeeze. Will felt fingers tangling between his own, but they quickly pulled away as Hannibal cupped Will's hand between his, eyes shining with adoration.

"You may use them. You have unusual dexterity for a dog, but that only proves your intelligence," Hannibal complimented, letting Will's paw drop to the floor. He stood with a final ruffle of Will's hair, pulling his chair back and sitting. Will looked up at him, then, tall and far from the ground as he ordered, "Do not eat until I tell you to."

Frustration ripped through Will's stomach with a hungry roar. He kept his composure, though, letting the desperation that came with denial fill his eyes and not his mouth. Staring up at his keeper, he felt them grow watery with hunger, wide with pleas; Hannibal's own flicked back and forth, catching and releasing Will's gaze with conflicted blinks.

Sighing, Hannibal mumbled, "Very well. You may eat."

Will shook his foot, a quick, happy thing as satisfaction coursed through him. The bowl was warm, as Hannibal had mentioned, and the meat bled as much as it had upon the first incision. It didn't roll against his skin spilling its contents, and kept heat just as Hannibal's hand.

Will heard the man's silverware in use above him, though he didn't care for looking up; everything beneath his mouth was exciting enough. He licked his bowl clean, bone-deep pleasure filling him as he swallowed. Warmth grew in his stomach at the idea of both him and Hannibal eating at the same time, so close together. There, lying on the floor, Will felt

nearer to the man than he had sitting across the table; he only sank lower to the floor at the thought.

As he was licking ragged bits of meat from the grooves of his molars, Hannibal glanced down and met his eyes. He observed for a moment, smiling as he praised, "Good boy, Will. You've done remarkably well."

"Are we done?" Will yawned, aware of the pointed teeth that poked forth at the gesture.

"Yes. You may stand if you so choose," Hannibal commented, then unceremoniously returned to his meal.

As the man continued eating, Will considered his offer. He would lose the comfort of being so near to the Earth's heart. He would lose Hannibal's gentle praise and soft touch. He would lose his place at his keeper's feet.

The clock kept ticking.

Will waited for Hannibal to set his silverware down, finished with his meal. As expected, Hannibal looked down for Will's choice; Will locked eyes with him.

The cannibal blinked several times in quick succession. He sat there, still, before reaching out with his hand. "Shall we retire to the couch? Hm?" Hannibal encouraged, voice rising in playful question.

Will pulled himself up, placing his weight on his paws and pressing his nose to Hannibal's palm. He yipped, small and sated, eyes closing as Hannibal once again scratched his chin.

The hand disappeared, leaving Will's head floating as Hannibal said, "Come." The man then stood, pushing in his chair and walking towards the living room. Will let Hannibal move a few steps ahead before falling into place behind him. His knees hit the ground and his palms slipped against the wood floor with each step, uneven and uncoordinated. Even so, the cool floor felt refreshing against his food-warm hands, a sobering breath of air. Will wanted to roll against it- to cloak his back in clean wood-smell.

"Heel."

Hannibal's voice came from several feet away, further than Will had intended; he had stopped moments earlier, lost in thought.

Will noticed how Hannibal's fingers tapped against his slacks, calling him to his feet; he followed. He bristled at how his shoulder rolled lopsidedly, but rejoiced in the warmth of his keeper's leg as he pressed up against it, grateful for the stability.

"When I tell you to heel, you come to my side. Do not stray or fall behind as I walk."

Immediately, Hannibal set off. The couch was not far, now; Will could see its silhouette in the dark room, feeding off the last living rays of sunlight. Hannibal walked slowly, second after second, as if savoring a metronome's heart-mimic beat. Will wobbled forward, keeping pace and letting each limb find its balance as Hannibal allowed him the time.

Will sighed with relief as his fingers sank into plush carpet. He knew it surrounded the couch, though he could barely see more than its towering form in the dark.

"I'll go turn on the light. Please sit on the couch; I will join you soon," Hannibal reassured, leaving Will to his own as he ventured off to find a lamp.

Will felt for the cushions, blindly pawing at them until one seemed plush enough beneath his weight. He jumped up, spine pressed against the back of the couch, and pulled his knees to his chest. His head lolled into the gap between two cushions, held perfectly in place; Will could moan with pleasure at the easy comfort.

Will flinched as the room filled with light, burying his face in the cushions. A smoky scent filled the room, though couldn't overpower the heat that emanated from Hannibal's body as he walked towards Will, one step heavier than the other. Will turned to greet his keeper, but twisted his face back into the fabric with a growl as the world blinded him with light and flame.

"I apologize for the brightness, but your eyes will adjust," Hannibal claimed, placing a hand on Will's head. "Will," he said, firm, "let me see your beautiful eyes."

The words were soft, but the voice rough; Will could not rest without knowing the expression on Hannibal's face. Light returned to him, inch by precious inch, as he turned his head to meet Hannibal's warm, toothed smile.

"There. Very good, Will."

A gust of air rushed past Will's head as his side of the couch rose, Hannibal sitting down with a graceless sigh. "Rest your head on my lap," he breathed, smoothing out his pants for Will to lay upon. Will extended a hand to feel the fabric; while it wasn't particularly soft, held warmth far better than the couch. As he pulled himself up towards Hannibal's lap, his foot caught a solid object; a leash sat neglected by Will's feet. With a huff of annoyance, Will brushed it to the floor and let his head fall to Hannibal's lap.

Immediately, a hand curled into his hair and began moving, back and forth- a simple thing that warmed Will's entire being. Hannibal brushed away wayward strands that fell from the movement, always before Will's lashes could flutter in distress; Will resolved to keep them closed in case Hannibal's valiance wavered.

In the haze beneath his eyelids, Will sensed Hannibal's hand moving from his head to his back, up and down his spine. Warmth radiated to every cell in his body, and the deep breaths he'd been stealing came no longer, replaced by even air. His sole task was to lay on Hannibal's lap and receive what he was given; this, he could accomplish. It was as simple as counting the seconds as they faded to minutes- effortless, streamed into his ears by time itself.

Will did not notice Hannibal's movements growing slower until the man's hand stopped completely, resting on his cheek. He opened his eyes, blinking away the liquid blur of time.

The sun had fully set; a warm lamp lit a single corner of the room, but paled in comparison to the raging fire before Will. The flame's quiet piqued his interest in its peculiarity, rippling with light and warmth alone. Not a single spark crackled nor song roared; even so, Will could no longer hear time pass by on its mechanical wind. The fire's organic luminance pushed aside the room's stifling, earthen brown, keeping the cool of late-summer nights from gracing his and Hannibal's bodies. Will hadn't noticed the silent heat over the flush of his skin, but now, eyes open, he watched the flame jump and rejoice in its freedom. Its motion made Hannibal's still hand ever-heavier on Will's neck until he could no longer bear its warm weight, voicing a murmured question, "Are you doing anything?"

Hannibal jumped minutely, hand twitching with surprise. He cleared his throat, the sound rumbling through Will's body as he defended, "I am only admiring your beauty."

Will turned his head to meet Hannibal's eyes. They glowed with adoration, bright and watery; all of their stiff darkness had been replaced by flecks of honey-smooth gold.

Shaking his head, Will broke the contact and pulled himself from Hannibal's warmth. He sat up, stretching against the couch-back and groaning at the dull ache in his legs, "My knees hurt."

"We can purchase sufficient padding when we go into the city, soon," Hannibal replied, observing Will with fascinated tilts of the head. The implication of more to come hung heavy in the air; the knowing smirk on Hannibal's face begged to be torn from his lips, but Will only glared back, deflecting any affectionate amusement Hannibal could bring forth.

The cannibal's words had reminded him of waiting- waiting, alone, for his other to return. All he had negotiated with Hannibal had been a warning for when he needed to leave; he still knew nothing of what teacups had fallen from their shelves, shattering on the floor of Hannibal's mind.

Will tested the taste of his next words on his lips, speaking them in silence with a jerking tongue. Sure they would leave his mouth properly, Will mumbled, "You knew the shopkeep." More a statement than question- a request for confirmation.

The ease that had settled so deep in Hannibal's body drained away, replaced by cold tension. Will lamented how his movements, once so warm and fluid, froze into controlled approximations of natural motion; Will saw the tight thread beneath Hannibal's perfectly-crafted performance, desperately wishing to untie the noose tightening around the cannibal's neck.

"He was a very old acquaintance. We spent several evenings in Firenze together until he forced his hand," Hannibal said, eyes downcast and watching Will's fidgeting hands.

"Why did you-" Will breathed, reorganizing his words, "Did you like him?"

"He was beautiful," Hannibal sighed, closing his eyes. Will prayed the gesture was not one of pleasant reminiscence. As if answering his prayers, Hannibal continued, brows furrowing with intense displeasure. "I was fascinated with his form; he was a living Adonis, a god among beasts. But I only adored him in flesh, not in mind. He misinterpreted my admiration

as a love towards his character which, I am disappointed to say, was rather pig-like." In tandem with the fire's broken vow of silence in a crackling cry, Hannibal's eyes burst open with resentment as he spat, "All he was, was a sire looking for a dam to breed."

Will could not tear his eyes from the fire that had erupted on Hannibal's face, both physical and emotional. The light from the hearth before them cast rich shadows into his eye sockets, leaving glimmers of flame bouncing off the glossy whites of Hannibal's eyes. The wrinkles around them grew deeper, darker, until shadows streamed from his pupils and down his face. Will had never seen such an expression before; he could only stare in awe as Cabanel's angel sprung from the vessel of flesh and blood that was Hannibal Lecter.

"God had not intended for me to be the pig's dam," Hannibal growled, the rumble of shadow and ash pouring from his lips, "but mindless beasts such as Sordino do not distinguish between God's intent and man's foolishness."

The vibration of Hannibal's emotion moved through the couch to Will's skin. The man nearly shook from-

Will couldn't tell what from. All he could tell was that an errant tear threatened to spill from both his and Hannibal's eyes, filled with emotion beyond the scope of mere man. His affect swirled together in a great torrent of rage and sorrow, fronds of feeling floating in an endless stream of pain- one touch, and it would flood.

Will had never wanted it to overflow more. He'd been spared whatever horrors sat beneath Hannibal's skin for a while, now; he wanted to watch it tear through the thin layers with claws unsheathed. With eager breath, he asked, "Why didn't you eat him back then?"

Hannibal blinked hard, pushing away the rage that reddened the thousands of vessels nestled in the whites of his eyes. He turned to Will, pulling one side of his face into shadow, the other to flame. "I tried, have no doubt, but I hadn't expected the man to have god-like mortality," Hannibal remarked, turning back to the fireplace's heat. "He should be dead."

Slowly, Will released the tension that had wrapped around his spine, reclining on the couch. His movement didn't draw Hannibal's eyes back to his; only when he spoke did the cannibal's gaze snap to his lips, jumping erratically as they parted.

"He survived Il Mostro," Will whispered, reverent. Not even he, the monster's beloved, would have managed to escape when pinned beneath his weight; Coda's endurance had been a cursed miracle.

"My other living victim. You, dear Will, are the only one worthy of that title," Hannibal mourned, toothed words falling into ones of soft-edged regret.

Will adored how Hannibal shivered with misplaced jealousy. He did not want Will all to himself- not in the simple sense. What rolled off Hannibal's skin in waves was not the urge to hold, but to harm; he wanted Will to be the only one to bear the true intimacy of his blade.

Even so, to be called a victim was fear-filled and false; Hannibal's actions were ones of twisted love that Will craved. Will couldn't keep the words from leaving his mouth,

unshakeable, "I'm not your victim unless you make me; I'm your lover."

Hannibal let himself fall limp to the couch by Will's side. He kept the warmth in his chest from rising into a smile as Hannibal looked up at him, eyes devoid of all their fire-fueled sparks. Numerous strands of silver hair clung to the couch with static, floating between the cushions and his body. Will let his hand catch a few, observing how they defied gravity to taste his skin's heat; Hannibal followed suit, shifting to lay his head on Will's shoulder. As the cannibal settled onto the spot, he mused, "How fitting. My single living victim should be the half of my soul I cannot kill."

Will took a deep breath and let it out mechanically, forcing his body to relax beneath Hannibal's weight. He hadn't expected the sudden display of vulnerability after such a flaunting of swords; Hannibal felt small, face nestled into the crook of Will's neck, hair falling over his eyes. Will's hand twitched with need, urging him to feel the warmth that radiated from Hannibal's scalp; he acquiesced, brushing stray strands aside and catching Hannibal's flickering lashes on his finger.

He let his hand hover for a moment before submerging it in Hannibal's hair and scratching gently; he felt the hairs at the man's nape spring upwards in response. Just as Hannibal had done unto him, Will lavished the man with gentle caresses, praying the touch would douse his flame of passion enough to talk in earnest.

Hannibal let out a long-held sigh. Taking the breath in hand, Will asked, voice soft, "Why didn't he know your name?"

Hannibal did not stiffen, this time. Will barely kept a grin of satisfaction from running across his face as Hannibal blinked, considered his words, and replied smoothly, "Coda was and will be the last to be so ignorant. He knew me as a starving artist and not a medical student, a peasant and not a count, and a woman and not a man; such was the price I paid for my anonymity."

Will paused his ministrations. "I know we both lived different lives before we found each other, but-" he swallowed, saliva standing in his throat uncomfortably, "but what that entails never really came to me."

"We all have a past we wish to conceal. Ours simply coincides with our bodies; much of our past is in the flesh we left on our respective operating tables," Hannibal replied, thoughtfully placing his hand over Will's.

Will squeezed it, trying to keep his rage from overflowing into his voice, instead rattling his hand as he asked through gritted teeth, "Did Coda hurt you?"

"He made a futile attempt," Hannibal sighed, hand still against Will's shaking fingers. "He turned to pure physical violence as soon as he saw I was something other than human, instead of continuing with any advances."

All of Hannibal's emotion had seemed to pass into Will. The tears that before threatened, now clawed their way out of his tear ducts with full force, warmed by the fire before them.

Will forced out a question, trembling with the weakness that fury brings, "What did he see? Il Mostro?"

Will swallowed, throat stinging as he watched Hannibal give a single twitch. The cannibal closed his eyes and leaned into the hand that still lay against his head, whispering, "He saw a man- a man hiding behind a woman's bloodied veil. That was the most monstrous thing he could conceive."

Will dug his fingers into Hannibal's hair, his nails abandoning flakes of skin in their wake. "No other pig will ever touch you. Not even Mason dared to touch you with his bare hands; Coda will wish he'd never even looked at you after we-" he paused, anger turning to hope as rain does a flood, "We'll plan a tableau."

Hannibal eyed him warily, taking in bared teeth and shaking limbs. Will didn't try to keep his body from responding; Hannibal would have to see his rage in its full glory. Will would use it to bring forth a shower of ripe, blood-red reckoning.

His chest heaved and the flesh beneath his fingers broke. "You used Mason to help Alana and Margot have a child, right?" Will breathed, voice rough with ecstatic desperation. "How?"

"Do you know what happens to a body when you stimulate the prostate with a cattle prod?" Hannibal answered, prying his head from Will's grasp. Will winced, both in response to Hannibal's urge to flee, and the implications of Mason's treatment.

"My only regret was keeping Mason under general anesthesia instead of a paralytic agent. The catharsis would have been even greater," Hannibal sighed wistfully.

"Displacement- misplaced revenge for what was done to you so long ago," Will commented, returning his hand to Hannibal's head with apologetic strokes. "Now that we have Coda, what will you do?"

"Nothing."

Will kept from laughing with disbelief as he struggled to form a sentence, tripping over his words before Hannibal cut him off.

"I have already found my catharsis, Will. Besides- the experience was long ago and not terribly damaging; I am a psychologist, after all."

"It didn't look like that when you were seething with hatred a few minutes ago. Don't hide your anger from me," Will reprimanded, wrapping his hand around Hannibal's neck and pulling him close. "Let me see you."

An eternity seemed to pass as Hannibal considered his options. Will prepared to grip the scruff of the man's neck to encourage him before it vibrated against his hand as Hannibal said, "We can revisit the town and go back to where we left off. A wonderful idea."

"Will we buy you a harpsichord this time?" Will asked, teeth hovering sharp over the petal-soft flesh of Hannibal's lips.

"Once the problem is resolved."

"Fair enough. But maybe, before we resolve it," Will paused, dragging the leash that he'd abandoned on the floor to Hannibal's feet, "I want to see where you got this leash from."

Hannibal looked down at the leash, up at Will's lips, and smiled. "Absolutely. Besides, I need to pick an order up from there; I'm sure you will be delighted to see it."

"Don't be so sure. You don't know how I'll react," Will teased, snaking his hands up Hannibal's back and savoring his warmth against the clammy surface of his own palms. He no longer felt blood rushing past his ears, nor the fruitless tremble of tense, angry muscles; he and Hannibal would rectify the wrongs of the past.

"You did very well without even being familiar with my commands, Will. I am impressed."

Hannibal's voice resonated through the hollow of Will's chest, seeping into his hands like warm liquid. He melted into the praise, leaning closer and placing his lips by Hannibal's ear, resting his head by the man's neck. He let out a sigh, relieved to speak of more joyful things. His breath pulled from Hannibal a minute twitch, drawing a smile from Will in return.

"Learned from my pack."

"Perhaps we should explore what else you learned from them; your knowledge of canine behavior far exceeds mine."

"I want to see what you know, first. How do you intend to love a dog you don't know anything about?" Will huffed, amused with Hannibal's humble admission.

"You are not a stray, Will, but a trained rescue. I know enough about how your mind works to 'play with it,' as you say."

Will mourned the loss of heat as he pulled away from Hannibal, giving the man a questioning glance before kneeling to pick up the abandoned leash. "You can't entirely predict me," he challenged, holding the cool leather reverently in his palms as it warmed.

"Perhaps. But I can understand why you act against my predictions," Hannibal retorted, taking Will's occupied hand and wrapping it around his waist. "You want to see what I'll do."

"Perhaps," he whispered, losing track of where Hannibal's arms ended and his began. Piece by piece, Will could no longer trace his legs, his lungs, nor his eyes, until Hannibal fused their lips together, as well- a final culmination of their merging.

Each kiss died and returned to life slowly, leaving Will gasping for new air each time they parted. He felt the leash in his hand, digging into his skin until all sensation faded into Hannibal, and Hannibal alone. Will knew if he held it tight enough, this would never leave him; he would never let the leash go, and Hannibal would never let him go.

He held the kiss until his fingers ached.

Chapter End Notes

A new chapter will be out soon! Maybe a month, tops. It is in the works 😊 life has been busy and hectic, but I recently felt a little rush of happiness in my chest thinking about these two little cannibals in my silly little story and now I would very much like to continue writing this 👍 fun fact: I was going to totally scrap coda and cadenza but I am intrigued to see where everything goes with them, plot-wise. Why not.

Formation

Chapter Summary

"Do you like it?"

The question flooded his blood vessels, breaking the skin like the first bite into juice-swollen fruit. Will nodded, silent. Weight and pressure and stillness were a comfort; *this* was a comfort. As Hannibal slipped the glove off, Will wiggled his fingers to readjust to freedom. It felt a defeat to admit that he enjoyed being so confined, but Hannibal's smug satisfaction elicited no rage, no teeth; he wanted Hannibal to be as pleased always as he was now, licking sticky sweetness from his lips.

Chapter Notes

Hi! I'm back! This chapter has been in the works for months but i got the urge to work on it. and other wips :) enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

All Will wanted was to press his lips to the rose-mimic leather beneath his thumb. It breathed when he pushed it into itself, embossed petals folding around his skin and sucking him in, and sprang back to life upon release. His fingernail caught inside a groove; Will let it trace the flowing line, angle after angle as the design protruded from its solid base. The collar lay heavy on his palm, thick yet elegant; he wanted to feel it tingling with a calf's stifled life against his lips.

Slow, light footsteps appeared behind him as he turned the collar in his hand. Will kept his eyes on the object, though his mind directed its full attention to Hannibal's lips, bracing for their impact.

"Are you contemplating its taste on your tongue?" Hannibal asked, placing his thumb beside Will's. "I understand completely; the craftsmanship is excellent and warrants such an urge."

"It's one of many things I'm contemplating at the moment," Will sighed, stealing furtive glances at the array of collars, cuffs and leashes surrounding him. It was not physically overwhelming—for this, he was grateful—but the sheer foreignness of their situation brought a cold dampness to Will's hands. He passed the collar to Hannibal, who took over Will's task

of running appreciative fingers over its surface. “How did you even find this place?” Will questioned, watching the care with which Hannibal handled the leather.

“It is a garden of earthly delights; I believe it draws in those searching for such pleasures. Perhaps you should entertain your thoughts of taste by the section meant for oral stimulation.”

The phrase sent a shiver down Will’s spine. The sensation originated from his throat, which flexed at the implications of Hannibal’s words. “I’d rather not go alone. Don’t wanna get lost in all of...” Will caught a gag out the corner of his eye, a bright red ball hung in its center. Imagining how his teeth would sit uncomfortably around the object, he swallowed, covering the pause by finishing his sentence, “...all of this.”

“I have to pick up an order, first,” Hannibal let him know, turning and starting towards the counter; Will followed.

“Collars to go with the leash, right?” he asked for confirmation, a shining pearl of excitement forming on his tongue; Will swallowed it down to feign distant disinterest.

Hannibal gave a subtle nod. “I recommend you join me to familiarize yourself with them.”

A familiar newscap sat atop the empty clerk counter. Will peered into it- empty. Just behind the counter lay a violin case, quickly obscured by scurrying feet and a bright voice.

“Two custom orders for... Hannibal. Feel free to take them out and see if there’s anything you need changed.”

From beneath a veil of dark hair came an equally dark box, delivered by a pair of pale hands. As they let go, the matte callouses atop each fingertip- from sharp strings, no doubt- sprang back into position. Will tilted his head. “You’re the violinist I saw in front of the music store. I appreciated the song.”

He caught the woman’s glittering eyes as they crinkled at the edges with a smile. “I noticed.” She returned to gently opening the box, revealing two leather collars, each nestled into its own ring of plush red lining.

Will felt his eyes sticking to the collars’ smooth surface; he dislodged them, pupils bouncing from face to collar to counter. Faced with either expressing his appreciation for the violinist’s playing, or pulling a collar from its boxed home, Will settled for the former.

“My dad owned a fiddle,” he uttered, catching the clerk’s attention. “He used to play that song with me accompanying him on piano.”

“Oh! Mine played piano instead, but I was always accompaniment, too,” she responded, eyes bright with a new glimmer of connection.

As Hannibal pulled one collar out of the box to inspect it—silver, shining in the sunlight—Will ran her words through the bowels of his memory. To his knowledge, the piece had been

mainly for the fiddle; or had his dad been mistaken all his life? “There’s an accompanying violin part?”

“Apparently,” the woman sighed, letting a cold breeze slip past her warm smile. The flame quickly returned, though, with crackling energy. “So! Any requests?”

“Will?”

Hannibal made to place a different collar in his hands, its golden hardware clacking as it moved in his palms. Will caught a glimpse of the metal plate that sat in its center, reading, “WILL”.

He shivered.

“Looks fine,” Will nodded, extending a stiff yet courteous smile to the cashier as he left Hannibal to his own devices and disappeared into the leather labyrinth behind.

The threat of holding his name so firm in his hands was a new experience. The implications ingrained into the tanned flesh pulled a deep-rooted discomfort from Will’s stomach; he didn’t want to be chained to so permanent an object. And yet its solidity, the firmness of its existence, satisfied the need for something to fill his chest.

Strips and strings of leather hung in dark, layered nests across the walls. Some of the harnesses were draped over mannequins, framing their chests and crawling up their backs; ghosts of straps digging into his skin traveled up Will’s spine. He could imagine the soft cages tightening around him, holding his flesh ever-dearer as Hannibal pulled them tight. Will breathed in; with a harness around his chest, he’d feel it press his ribcage into itself—a harsh pressure distributed evenly to hold him still.

As Will walked the aisles, he saw and felt more and more weight cloak his bones. Muzzles wrapped around his head, rope tangled and twisted across his stomach, and fingers of silicone poked and prodded at every entrance imaginable. Want coiled in his throat; Will let out a long sigh to release tension as he came to a stop upon spotting an odd glove.

It was large and padded, a small paw-print sewn over its black stub. It didn’t have the web-string complexity of harnesses and muzzles; the mitt confined all inside, nothing exposed to the cool open air.

“I see you’ve found some mitts,” Hannibal said from behind, urging Will’s muscles to tense once more. “Would you like them for your hands and knees? It would make crawling much more pleasant.”

Will blinked away the mental image of Hannibal’s suggestion. “I think you’re overestimating how much I want to crawl.”

The cannibal took the mitt from its hook and wrapped his fingers around its rim, holding the hole open; its tightness blanched his fingernails and wrung a slight tremble from Hannibal’s finger-muscles.

Will slipped on the unpaired mitt. His fingers passed by the rim with ease, the stretchy fabric accommodating his fist until it popped through. He curled his hand and, pressing his knuckles to the soft interior, flexed his fingers against the space; they barely moved. The pressure on his hand, pinned in place, flowed through his entire body, its contents spilling like pulp from a juiced citrus, strings sticking to patches of exposed flesh.

“Do you like it?”

The question flooded his blood vessels, breaking the skin like the first bite into juice-swollen fruit. Will nodded, silent. Weight and pressure and stillness were a comfort; *this* was a comfort. As Hannibal slipped the glove off, Will wiggled his fingers to readjust to freedom. It felt a defeat to admit that he enjoyed being so confined, but Hannibal’s smug satisfaction elicited no rage, no teeth; he wanted Hannibal to be as pleased always as he was now, licking sticky sweetness from his lips.

Hannibal cradled the pair of mitts in the basket of his elbow, taking Will’s hand in his and running a thumb over his knuckles. “You enjoy the sensation of physical captivity,” he stated — less an observation, and more a suggestion to reinforce the truth. He pressed a finger to the curve of Will’s knuckles and watched the fingers jump from triggered tendons.

“No, not captivity,” Will corrected, shaking his head to rid it of the unpleasant thought. He enunciated the next word clearly, making sure Hannibal could not mistake it for anything else, “Security.”

Hannibal nodded thoughtfully. “Come,” he ushered Will forth with a guiding hand. “What do you think of a muzzle?”

They entered an aisle with faces lining the walls- some human, some animal, and many more blurred between beasts. One mask in particular stood out- a familiar one, transparent for all to see the creature underneath. Will let his eyes pass over it without flair, but couldn’t suppress the shudder that overtook him when memories of hot, condensed air and cold, stale, prison-cell air prodded at his mind.

Will breathed in, preparing to bare his teeth against Hannibal’s suggestions, “I know I bite, but-“

The cannibal cut him off with a soft finger over the small of his back.

“Ghosts of the past,” he whispered, removing the finger once Will nodded. “We are haunted by our many former lives. I repeat myself because the sentiment is particularly relevant to us; I understand your concern, Will.”

Will turned and caught yet another familiar face. It shone a brilliant white, dotted with a neat circle of holes in its center. He picked it up, relishing how the surface glided against his fingertips. “Are you haunted by your captivity?” Will asked, eyes fixed to the white mask.

Hannibal didn’t respond; Will turned to him, catching subtle snaps of Hannibal’s jaws as he shifted them with discomfort. Noticing Will’s attention, Hannibal clenched his teeth and explained, “I am not haunted by it in mind, but my body seems to remember the touch.”

“Spontaneous recovery?” Will offered, placing the mask back on a hanger, far from its rightful place shielding Hannibal’s teeth. The cannibal’s eyes followed it until it sat firmly against the wall.

“It is a possibility,” Hannibal replied, moving a step away and wrapping his fingers around a strip of leather; Will leaned over the man’s shoulder to catch a glimpse of what had captured his attention, but only succeeded in finding Hannibal’s pointed gaze out the corner of his eyes.

Hannibal turned, slowly, presenting the object on his two open palms. “This one has a strip of silicone that sits inside the mouth, resembling a horse’s bit,” he said, holding it up for Will to interact with.

The urge to bite down on the bright blue silicone made Will’s teeth ache. He imagined its smooth surface against his lips, pristine and easily wet by his tongue. He swallowed, dragging down the saliva that had pooled behind his teeth. “Or a dog bone. Something to gnaw on for a while.”

Hannibal moved his thumb to the bit-turned-bone, dragging his warm flesh over the silicone as he mused, “A bone makes one focus on the animal pleasure of the mouth, while a bit grants the beast’s handler control. How fitting that you gravitate towards blatant hedonism; even your desire for captivity stems from a desire to feel gentle pressure against your skin, and not a lash across your face.”

Will twitched, the muscles revealed by Hannibal’s precise skinning jerking in their nakedness. He wanted to be known, to be seen, and yet each of Hannibal’s revelations pried his ribcage open inch by painful inch; he could no longer keep his organs from spilling out. He could no longer suppress the heat that crept up his face, filling the skin with blood and bringing with it thoughts of firm restraint and a wandering tongue.

“Are you feeling shame, knowing I see so much?” Hannibal asked, a wry smile accompanying the subtle boast.

“Maybe,” Will scoffed, quickly mending his tone with honesty. “Maybe I’m just not familiar with discussing it all with you.”

“Hence the purpose of being in a place where such conversation is encouraged,” Hannibal reassured, wrapping one hand around the silicone bar and the other around Will’s shoulder. “Tell me, Will, have you ever discussed using tools to enhance your sexual experience with a partner? Yourself, perhaps?”

Will couldn’t ignore the tremor that ran down his shoulder, though not from his own spine; Hannibal’s grip shook. The man’s matter-of-fact tone only spurred on his own shiver. Will pushed down the realization of Hannibal’s jealousy—hidden jealousy, but jealousy nonetheless.

“Not with partners, no. But I’m familiar with myself. I know what I want,” Will said, voice low and enunciating clearly.

“Do you?”

His fingers curled into shaking fists. He wanted to rip Hannibal’s self-assuredness from his throat; he only responded, sweet and sharp, “You’ve sliced me open for the whole word to see and set my brain on fire, Hannibal. I know how to douse and stoke the flame; surely, you can’t miss that.”

Hannibal dropped his hand from Will’s shoulder. He opened the box that had been nestled under his arm, lifting a brown, flower-crowned collar by two strong fingers. “These are strawberry flowers. The flower in particular, and not its fruit, is a common symbol of lust and Machiavellian debauchery.”

“So it’s a symbol of passion. A bit plain for your tastes, don’t you think?” Will retorted with a dismissive tilt of the head. Its meaning was simple, common; he’d expected more from the Ripper.

“It has more depth when paired with your name. The flower’s bloom is decided not by tradition, but by those who pollinate it.”

Before Will could inquire about what twisted metaphor Hannibal was employing, the man cut him off with gentle words in response to his biting ones. “Please, Will, show me what you want. If you know yourself as well as you say, then I am eager to see you unveil what I have not yet bore witness to.”

Will blinked rapidly, sifting Hannibal’s intent through his nervously fluttering lashes. “You want me to just show you what I want to buy? No questions asked?”

Hannibal slowly lowered the collar to its proper place confined within the dark box. He swallowed; Will tracked the bob of his throat as it fell, rose, and danced as he spoke, “Without any influence on my end. Bloom, watered and tended to by Earth alone.”

He looked Hannibal up and down, taking in the loose sway of the jacket draped over his arm, the box neatly tucked by his side, the eagerness shining bright through his dark irises. Not a single hair stood up with static, and not a single breath rushed out with excitement. Hannibal stood still, lying in wait; he would rise only on Will’s command.

Though he couldn’t keep hesitation from seeping into his acquiescent nod, Will stepped forward and let Hannibal follow in his thought-heavy tracks. The aisles didn’t loom over his head as they had before; now they met his eyes, each product an opportunity. His fingers flew to them like reverent followers to a king, a saint, a god, reaching and grasping like their salvation depended on it. How quickly power moved from man to beast to object, Will mused to himself as he let his hand run over everything in sight. He wrapped his palm around a hollow silicone sheath, fingers sliding past its pointed tip to a base adorned by a thick bulb. The protrusion gently caught his fingers as they curled loosely over the knot.

He swallowed, opened his mouth to tell Hannibal that he wanted it, wanted to try it, wanted to feel it burn and burst inside him, but all speech was halted by Hannibal’s hand wrapping around his own.

“You need not speak of your interest for me to notice it. I will take all you want when I see your eyes blacken with lust and your hands weaken with starvation,” Hannibal murmured, his voice a low murmur. He took the object from Will, placing two fingers into the gaping hole at its base. “This is meant to go over a penis to increase its size. Do you intend to use it with your anatomy?”

“I’ll fit,” Will snapped with a show of teeth; he took a steadying breath and hid them as Hannibal’s eyes widened slightly. “And if I don’t,” he growled, anger sheathed yet ready to strike if Hannibal bit again, “there are other ways to use it. Do you think my anatomy would stop me from getting what I want?”

What seemed to Will surprise faded into quiet amusement. “Definitely not, Will,” Hannibal soothed with a smile; his lips barely hid his tongue gliding against his teeth. “I am only curious as your partner. I’m not familiar with such toys, and a canine knot is something new to me; we all must learn and adapt, after all.”

Will left Hannibal with a glare as he kept walking. He bristled as the cannibal placed the silicone object into a rustling bag, aware of its sole purpose—to please and knot and lock in place.

As he moved through the shop, Hannibal’s attentive hands flashed from the corner of his eye, taking hold of all that Will desired. The man followed without a word; it took little more than a prolonged glance at a muzzle or toy for Hannibal to take it. His silence calmed Will: he found imagining the objects around him put to use was simpler without discussing the moral and psychological implications of pleasure. He took and took until he could see nothing grander than a thousand stinging tongues and soothing touches over bare skin. So much of his existence had been muted and muffled by passionless cries in the night; only Hannibal’s knife could draw out the heart-wrenching sobs that fluttered from his throat. He hungered to be stabbed over and over again—through words, through touch, through thought; at least then, he would be held close until his dying breath.

~

Everything lay splayed out across the table. Where meals had once been shared, now sat nourishment for a fiercer, bloodier hunger. Will brushed past the array of prosthetics and restraints they had bought, instead heading for what Hannibal had initially praised—the collars.

He dug into the box’s plush lining and took out the smaller, brown collar. It was not a bright brown like earthen clay, but of dirt and dark; Will dared not look in the mirror, for fear of seeing it colored like the hair atop his head. Instead, he pressed a digit into it, compressing the padded interior and watching it spring back into position. Hannibal did the same, running his fingers over the fine silver leather of his own collar.

“I like it. It’s good quality—durable,” Will admitted, earning a knowing smile from Hannibal. Upon closer inspection of the man’s collar, he caught a shimmer of metallic softness from the silvery interior. “Yours has fur?”

“I prefer it that way,” the man replied matter-of-factly, placing the collar back into its box.

Hannibal had put a lot of thought into the collars; Will couldn't deny it. The lambskin-soft padding, the deliberate choice not to include sweat-clinging fur, the collar stiff yet soft, embossed with a meaningful symbol and dyed with intent. He wanted to clamp it around his neck and wear this—only this, and nothing more—for as long as possible; his hunger made him shiver. Will fought to keep gratitude from flooding his veins, its ferocity manifesting as bitter bile that threatened to overflow onto his tongue.

He felt sick.

The cool breeze of Hannibal's steady movements as he milled about the kitchen returned Will to some semblance of calm. His nails had left harsh crescents in the plush padding around dead, bloodless leather-skin. His thumb sat against the cold metal plate, his name proudly displayed on its golden surface.

His name was not golden and not meant to sit against his throat and not made to be stuck to one place without movement. Wrongness burrowed into his brain like a parasite. What irritated him was not Hannibal's thoughtfulness—if it could even be considered such—but the control he exercised. Will had no voice, no choice in the matter, no ability to say that it was all wrong.

Hannibal didn't see it, this time.

His blindness followed Will all the way to his room. Contrasting colors mixed in the room's atmosphere, diffusing all harsh light into a golden haze. Will breathed deeply, savoring sweet safety, and placed the collar on his desk. As he sat by it, his fingers curled instinctively around a set of tools; they pried and prodded at the tag, cool metal growing warm as it was worked.

His name dropped with a bright clack against the wooden desk. The sound rang in Will's ears, the only bells he'd ever known to bring joy—close enough to a wedding.

He filled the empty space left on the leather with a d-ring, where the tag hung still-ringing, metal against metal. It almost seemed a song, calling to his exposed throat as it echoed in its hollow, a brother to his still vocal cords. One could not resist the siren song; Will pressed it to his neck and buckled the clasp at his nape.

The tag jingled as his trembling hands closed the collar around his bobbing throat. It tightened as Will swallowed, released as he exhaled, went taut again as he inhaled, all the while letting out chimes more akin to whimpers. Will slid his hands down his chest, slowly, holding his lungs in his palms and feeling how they pulled the leather snug around his windpipe. All was moving, all was alive, all was blood and breath and body.

“Will?”

Hannibal's voice pulled Will straight out of his close-eyed stillness. He jumped, tag ringing with the movement.

“Are you alright?”

He stood at the open door. Had it been open so wide, Will couldn't remember, but he hadn't forgotten Hannibal's silence.

"Why are you asking?" Will replied, placing his hands on his knees and straightening in his chair. Hannibal's failure to question him before had been a blessing; now, it was only a nuisance.

"It is important to assess both our comfort levels when being so vulnerable with each other. I believe we've agreed it is necessary to maintain our dynamic," Hannibal defended, nodding, bringing Will's own head along with the movement. Will followed the man's eyes, tracking them even as they left his gaze and landed upon the hanging name tag. "You've removed your name."

"I moved the tag," Will corrected, taking a hand to his chest. He moved the metal between his thumb and index, relishing its warmth as it seeped into his fingers. Hannibal watched the gesture intently as Will elaborated, "I don't like seeing my name on the collar. It makes me feel confined to one spot, one thing."

"Is that not security?" Hannibal questioned, following the metal's swing as it dropped.

Will shivered with satisfaction as the tag clacked against his breastbone. It rang louder still as he shook his head. "No—it's captivity. *This* is freedom."

"You will wear it only when you see it as a symbol of freedom and true pleasure—not of confinement."

"Yes," Will mused, letting the sibilance ring and fade. "Now it has a personalized touch, too. I prefer it that way." He looked to Hannibal, watching realization dawn upon him with the echoed words.

"Understood." Hannibal accepted the request so readily; Will couldn't help but grin.

He stood, moving Hannibal out of the door with courtesy's invisible command. His first step shunted a wave through Will's body that ended with the name moving against his chest. The tag jingled with each consecutive step; Will resisted the urge to run just to hear its joyous chimes. He placed his hand into Hannibal's instead, relishing how the man's grip grew tight around his fingers.

"Although I'm preparing dinner," Hannibal said, head turning towards Will as they walked, "I think it would be wise to look over our purchases once more."

Will raised an eyebrow. "Any specific reason in mind?"

"Greed."

He caught a glimpse of Hannibal's pointed teeth before his lips drew their thick veil over his fangs' wet-hungry shine. Will couldn't agree more; his fingers ached to hold what were their righteous possessions.

When they reached the table, Will placed both hands firmly on either side of all the objects. They sat under his chest, from palm to palm, cradled by his desire to hold them—to own them. His eyes rolled over them in waves, feeling every curve, each point of pressure, each jutting head and swelling shaft.

“These aren’t all solely for you to use,” Hannibal chided, pulling Will’s attention from their territory. “Feeling possessive, Will?”

The amused remark launched Will’s teeth at Hannibal’s throat. He deflected the question immediately, snapping, “Aren’t you?”

“Not of the physical objects. Only of you, dear boy.”

Hannibal placed a palm on the small of Will’s back, sending heated signals up the taut, shivering line of his spine. The firm towers of Will’s arms faltered, weakening and allowing sensation-seeking fingers to drag over a stiff silicone gag. Hannibal’s softness, his hand’s stiffness—all of it merged into a lump in his throat, twisting his words into a low, rumbling thing. “I want them all. I want to use them all right here right now,” Will mumbled—barely a plea, almost a command. Blood pounded in his ears and the blanched palm-skin against the table thumped with pressure.

“Patience,” Hannibal hummed. The word rang in Will’s ears against the ceaselessly clanging metal of his blood. It quieted as Hannibal’s hand traveled up his back and sat on the scruff of his neck, slipping its fingers into the space between leather and muscle. “Let us work our way up.”

“You think I can’t take everything? You know I’m a big dog.” The words were round and obscene in Will’s mouth, new and artificial, clumsy and blocking off his throat twice at their tail-ends. He dropped his head back, trapping the fingers at his nape to nip at their fingertips.

“I know it will be much more pleasurable for you if we exercise caution in regards to both of us,” Hannibal added, pulling his hand from Will’s grasp and instead wrapping it around his own collar’s width. The sudden loss of heat pulled a growl of displeasure from Will’s throat, though was quickly quieted by the neatly-presented collar before him.

It lay on Hannibal’s open palms—a gift to one better, fairer than him. The cannibal offered, soft, “I give you the privilege of capturing me.”

Will licked his lips, wiping Hannibal’s foreign words from their surface. They were a bittersweet lie. “It’s not a capture if you’re willingly giving yourself up.” He took the fur-lined collar from Hannibal’s hands, unbuckling the silver hardware at its back and circling around to face the cannibal’s spine. Will pulled it back until the fur sat flush against Hannibal’s warming throat, brought both ends around, and buckled them back together. “There’s no fight, no blood; it’s deliberate submission.”

Will’s hands lingered on Hannibal’s neck, filling with vibrations as the cannibal spoke back. “It’s love.”

He circled back around, slowly and deliberately, Hannibal's eye tracking him at the same pace—a predator's gaze against a beast's claws. He placed his hand on Hannibal's cheek.

The cannibal's gaze was unbearably soft. It clung to Will, sticky with sweetness and mellow to the mouth; its tongue bore no teeth, no bitter bruises. Hannibal just stood there, eyes bright and adoring. They flickered wild with peaceful devotion, burned quiet with raging stillness. Will felt the heated embers crackle against his skin, caressing him with impossible feather-light touches that only made him bristle with hostility. He felt a dark, pulsing mass against Hannibal's pure brightness; he wanted to pry the cannibal's neglected jaws open and set the sheathed fangs onto his flesh.

Wind whistled past Will's ears as he turned to take the leash into claw-curved hands. His thumb flicked the lever that opened its silver clip and pressed it to the shining ring at Hannibal's throat.

The cannibal swallowed. The leash rose and fell in Will's hand, sighing with satisfaction at its newfound fullness.

He jerked the leash downwards.

Hannibal followed.

The cannibal's head dipped, neck snapping downwards with little resistance. Hannibal forced it upwards immediately, the leash turning firm with tension in Will's grasp.

Will offered Hannibal no words. He only pulled and tugged, reveling in how the cannibal's neck muscles rolled and bulged against the silver leather. The skin folded at its edges, pouring over its solid cage and growing taut where cartilage collapsed into itself, closing the windpipe.

One rapid swing of the neck, up, down, brought tears to the edges of Hannibal's eyes as he coughed out, "Will."

It wasn't an outright rejection of force. Will didn't stop. He wouldn't stop until the cannibal did more than gasp when his air was cut; he would only stop if Hannibal begged on his hands and knees. The image's blurry, imagined edges burned white with fresh flame, pooling in his fingers and spurring them to action. Will wrapped the leash around his knuckles, whitening their snow-filled hills and valleys with another snap of the wrist. He watched in awe as Hannibal's neck tilted sideways, torso twisting and exposing his ribcage to the heavens. Each costal bone pierced the skin as the cannibal's knees faltered, trembling under Will's hand.

"I'll fall if you keep at this," Hannibal grunted, propping a solid leg beneath himself in vain; it bent, bringing him down with another swing of the leash. Will pulled Hannibal to his chest and planting a firm palm to the cannibal's bony sternum. He wrapped one more loop of the leash over his knuckles, claws crawling ever-closer to a pulse. Will's own tag jingled in time with his breath, distant compared to Hannibal's visually-deafening display of motion.

"I'll catch you."

Heat spilled from Will's mouth, mingling with the blood-warmth that rolled from Hannibal's exposed neck in waves. The cannibal's chest rose and fell—slowly, then frantically—as Will wrapped loop after loop around his hand. It drew closer, tighter, until his knuckles rested against Hannibal's soft throat. The column bobbed as he swallowed, its Adam's apple gracing each bulge of Will's knuckles in interrupted rhythm.

"I am not your dog tonight," Hannibal claimed, chest moving as his body stilled. His breath grew labored against Will's own chest.

Will failed to suppress a shiver when the throat-flesh writhed with breath. He wanted to be annoyed with Hannibal, but the coolness to his words wicked all heat from his mind and channeled it straight to his cock. Hannibal could be his dog. He could be whimpering and begging, hungry and obedient. He wanted it. Tonight. The implications of a future—of more than tonight—made Will's words uneven as he scrambled for confirmation, voice rising to overcome the ocean of blood flooding the low pit of his stomach. "Not tonight?"

"Perhaps another day. I am overjoyed you are so intimate with your instincts, Will, but I am not, yet." Hannibal shifted, grabbing Will's fist and prying it open, the leash hanging limp, loosened from its grasp.

Again, false-frustrated heat bubbled beneath Will's skin. Each hair of his body stood on end, stiffening into thousands of feather-soft claws. Will wanted to laugh, to cry, to inject truth into Hannibal's bloodstream with a quick blow to the face.

Instead, Will spoke with measured tongue. His hand tensed with the release of Hannibal's response in a heavy sigh; he knew the apprehension was just a performance. Will slipped a finger between the collar and the pulsing flesh pulled taut over the cannibal's carotid. He wouldn't let Hannibal see his free fist curling and uncurling, every nerve firing in a smooth chain, lips parting in uninterrupted unison. "Don't lie to me. You know that's not true."

Hannibal shifted uncomfortably. Will noted his fluttering eyelids and a sweep of tongue over his lips. "I am not prepared to surrender my power just yet. I haven't had nearly enough of your sweetness between my teeth."

Will steadied his impulses, then, slipping yet another finger into the joint where leash met collar, unbuckling the metal, and letting the strip drop to his open palm below. He didn't want to look at the cannibal's smile, all teeth and deception; sweet words would do the man no good. "Surrender is an instinct you want to suppress?" Will asked, setting the leash aside and returning his hand to the collar around Hannibal's neck. He placed his thumb on the gentle rise of cartilage, applying pressure. "If you want to suppress it, why are you letting me capture you?"

"A fault of mine. I easily surrender to the drunken stupor your unpredictable submission puts me in. I want to emulate it; a manifestation of your empathy blurring into mine, perhaps," Hannibal mused, shifting his head with a subtle twitch that Will felt beneath the pad of his thumb. "Besides," he paused, placing a still hand over Will's own. "It isn't wise for a pup to get over-excited if it doesn't know how to play safely with its owner. That goes for both of us."

Will released Hannibal, who turned to face him with deliberate languidness. He could feel the cannibal's mind urging its body to maintain its composure, breaths mechanical and body regaining its balance after the loss of support. Will absorbed Hannibal's words of blurry sweetness, parsing through the praise to find the root of meaning. Hannibal swayed slightly, a hand running over his chest in one long move to steady himself.

"You want to be sure you won't bite to kill," Will offered, standing still to gauge the extent of Hannibal's motion. He stilled as Will added, "But I'm not afraid to bleed." He steeled himself for a spill of passion, of admission, but melted at Hannibal's words.

"I'm not afraid of tearing yours open; I don't want to bite a hole through my own cheek. You of all people should be able to differentiate between the fears."

Will's teeth caught the hardened strip of skin on the inside of his cheek, thick cords threaded along the spool of a dead dragon's blade. Copper's ghost trickled from the wound—only a phantom. It coated his tongue in metallic warmth, seeping into his words. "Fear," he scoffed, turning away. He made a pacing circle and turned back to face the cannibal. "It's not fear."

Will continued with unrelenting flame.

"Break me. Break yourself. Break everything, and I still wouldn't fucking care if you're prepared or not. I know you are. You know you are."

Hannibal's hand twitched. Will couldn't help but smile as the man's fingers slipped against each other, unsure for a rare, precious second.

"Speak up."

Will tracked the lump in Hannibal's throat as it caught the collar. The man took his hands to the back of his neck, folding them at the elbows like bound wings as he removed the collar with a sparkling click. Will should have been frustrated, angry, hot with any tangible emotion that tore at his composure, but was only curious—curious what Hannibal would say.

The man placed the collar on the dinner table. When his hands joined together once again, their movements were erratic, minute finger-muscles stretching too far with every sign. "I want to take care of your needs," Hannibal started, the space between each word wide and open. "I can't do that when I am lost in the fiery haze of my own."

The same phrase, though in countless different forms, had left both their mouths time and time again, endless and cyclical as life itself. Surrendering in a way that pulled Will down and pushed Hannibal up was a simple task; all they had to do was sacrifice.

Hannibal wouldn't sacrifice his freedom; that much Will knew. If they were to be on unequal ground, the cannibal had to be brought down discreetly behind countless sheer, shimmering veils.

The most complex tasks often required the simplest of things—love, peace, rage.

"I want to show you something," Will said, extending his hand for Hannibal to take it. They both stood still for a moment, collars and toys neglected in the face of skin's animalic appeal.

Will released a sigh of relief, enough for breath to flee his chest, but not enough to make its empty visible; Hannibal took his hand without question.

The floor beneath them creaked as Will led Hannibal from the kitchen table to the living room's rumbling hearth. The thought of dinner sat heavy in the back of Will's mind; meat's telltale fibers and flesh's smooth warmth mingled on his tongue, ghosts of nights past. If Hannibal could sense the saliva slicking his cheeks, he did not show it. The man only followed, led blind by his lover as the other had been days prior. Will couldn't douse excitement's fiery tail enough to pierce Hannibal's thoughts, capable only of wondering—did Hannibal truly trust Will to lead him without knowing where to? Did he feel calm enough to follow, blind in the dark? A seed of doubt sat in Will's stomach at his own questions.

That seed collapsed into itself as they stopped over the living room rug. Will brushed the warm fireplace and soft rug from his mind, channeling the desire for comfort into his words and into Hannibal's actions.

“Lay down.”

Chapter End Notes

i lost the plot along with my confidence about what i'm doing somewhere along the way, but oh well. more puppy play, power dynamic issues, confrontation, soft moments, training/conditioning, and lots of porn are on the way!

End Notes

if anyone wants it, here is the playlist i've made for my personal atmosphere in this fic, just for fun: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1CJMWPtJQPu7PcTUjkHiM?si=32293c5e83e84de3>

any feedback so far would be greatly appreciated! <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!